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A WOMAN WITH WHITE EYES

Books by Mary Borden

JANE—OUR STRANGER
JERICHO SANDS
THE ROMANTIC WOMAN
THREE PILGRIMS AND A TINKER
FOUR O'CLOCK
FLAMINGO
JEHOVAH'S DAY
THE FORBIDDEN ZONE
A WOMAN WITH WHITE EYES

A.
WOMAN
WITH WHITE EYES

by

Mary Borden



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PART I

A WOMAN WITH WHITE EYES

CHAPTER I

THIS is a letter addressed to no one since there is no one alive to whom it could be addressed with any decency. But I want to tell Maggie's story and my own with it, so I'll tell it to myself since there is no one else who is interested. Alive or dead who is there to tell it to? The Abbé perhaps. He only met Maggie once; and I, though I thought of him as an exquisite friend, could never decide whether he was a great worldling or a saint. Perhaps he was both, since he was a priest. In any case he was trained in the art of understanding.

“I’m a shepherd,” he said to me one night at a very noisy dinner party. And he looked at me smiling over his glass of wine, his little bald head to one side. A subtle radiance illumined his brown wrinkled face, but I saw suddenly the marks of exhaustion, and saw him, as a dusty little shepherd, trotting after his lost sheep through the bleak drawing-rooms of Paris, foot-sore, heartbroken, solitary, calling to his stray flock that scurried away from him in the only

voice they would recognise, the voice of the witty worldling.

If a letter could reach him up there in his Paris garret, where I used to find him towards the end feeding the sparrows opposite the rainspouts of Saint Sulpice, I might send it to him.

“Dear Abbé; Herewith I send you a story about two women who were friends. You have the saintly detachment and the worldly cunning necessary for the understanding of blundering fools. The study of the souls of men has always been your passion. Read it and tell me what it all amounts to. It is, as you see, a double story, the story of two women’s lives. One part is vague, full of gaps, blurred. That’s my own. I can’t remember it clearly. The other is definite and detailed. That’s Maggie’s: Maggie Travers, whom you knew through me as Maggie Buckhaven. You met her when she stayed with me in Paris. You remember her tragedy, how I went to you afterwards. Read the full story now and explain it to me, bearing in mind that she never loved anyone but Buckhaven. I don’t pretend that she was a noble character, but I do know that she loved Buckhaven from the day she met him till the day she died, and that she was an honest creature. That’s the point, and that being so, how do you explain what happened? Something got hold of her, used her and destroyed her. She wanted Buck and no one but Buck

ever. She loathed the other man. And it wasn't as if she were a wishy-washy creature. She was a gallant little thing with iron in her make-up. But there's a power in the world, evidently, that is too much for any of us. You would call it the devil. I would call it Life. Never mind what one calls it. Is there a way of getting the best of it? You would say, Yes. But I don't want you to answer as a priest. This business is older than the Church. The Church was organised to cope with it several thousand years too late. It's a modern hospital for sick souls. One has to have a ticket of admission. We used to talk about it, you remember. You believe in faith and in repentance and in the divine miracle of Grace. But repentance, Abbé, is another disease. It comes afterwards when it's too late. It can undo nothing.

“As for faith, I don't know what it is. The word seems to mean knowledge of the future, an acquaintance with something beyond and outside Life. I have no such knowledge. I know that the world is very beautiful and Life a nightmare, but I cannot get out of the dream, and I do not know what it would be like to be awake.

“Once, long ago, I thought I saw God in a barn in California. I think it was a barn. There were a great many people on their knees, and an awful power seemed to fill the place like a wind, like the sound of the sea, and I thought it

was God. But now I think it was only mob hysteria, and although I have seen men all over the earth on their knees worshipping many different gods, I know nothing about any of them, except what I've been told by people like you, Abbé, and my old Swiss nurse, who taught me the German Bible. Her God is very different from yours. He holds us each one responsible to Himself alone, for our actions, and He demands of us an admission of total bankruptcy—she called it the conviction of sin. That's the Biblical phrase, isn't it? Only on that condition, only after a complete and shameful breakdown, only when we've lost our nerve finally, can we crawl, broken and heartbroken, and filled with self-loathing, to the steps of His awful Throne. If we do that He'll be kind. If we go back on the small invisible man inside us, the self that has endured somehow and been just able to keep alive, if we deny that bare, solitary minute being, the only living creature we know, then He'll save us, through His Son who died on the Cross and the explanation of how that works is very complicated.

“But your God, Abbé, is infinitely indulgent to anyone who acknowledges the miraculous power of the Church of Rome and those who do not are to Him of no consequence. He will whisk Sonia, who so enjoyed doing harm on the earth, into realms of celestial bliss, by a miracle,

because she was a Catholic as well as a cruel and heartless woman; while warm-hearted impetuous Maggie will be left wandering for ever in purgatory.

“And so I know nothing about God, and am not convinced when I remember the veiled figures of Indian women bowed before phallic symbols, or the yellow slit-eyed Chinamen petitioning the tombs of their ancestors, or the Buddhist monks rapt in meditation by dusty roads where men and women passed up and down, passed up and down, ceaselessly passed up and down.

“I have known you, Abbé and my old Nanny Ann, Sister Anna as she was called later in Switzerland, where I found her when I needed her again—but not God—Him I never knew. And now, I don’t want a promise of Heaven. I want an explanation of life and a weapon.”

Well, he is gone, the little Abbé. A brown sparrow perched under the eaves of an old house in the Rue de St. Pères, scattering crumbs of bread on his window-sill for the other sparrows, and crumbs of comfort for us; he has flown away over the roof-tops and I cannot reach him. He was very good to me when most people were not. But perhaps if he were there I wouldn’t after all address this to him. Perhaps it is because he is dead that I feel he would be a good person to

write to. If he were sitting opposite me now as he used to do in his shabby brown robe with his bright bird eyes gleaming in his little puckered face and the one thin wisp of hair standing up on his head like a question mark, I would probably have the same old sense of difficulty, distance, strangeness, and in the end the same disappointment. They say that the confessional has saved many people from the madhouse. I've no doubt it's true. It must be a great relief to slough off all one's heavy life on to someone else's shoulders. I never could do it, I can't do it now. This letter isn't a confession. I'm not suffering from the itch to strip in public. I'm merely puzzled. I simply want to know what it's all about, who I am, whether I have any identity at all, why Maggie came to a tragic end, whether there's another world, separate, different from this one. Just a few things like that are what I want to know. And I call this a letter because it requires an answer, and I fear the little Abbé couldn't answer. His worldly wisdom was celestial, but when it came to a simple, final question he would never speak for himself. He would always fall back on his great infallible authority, and I know there is no such thing in the world.

Who is there who could give me an interesting answer? Whom have I ever known who never adapted any old or new theories? Tawaska the Finn, perhaps, that queer walrus man from the

white north. He knows something, but he won't tell it. He's found out something, something deep, queer, hidden. I know this. I know he's been tracking it down behind Life, always, everywhere, while he was log-rolling on the Yukon, selling cigarettes to Chinamen, or peddling dried apricots among the Lamas of Thibet. But he never would answer questions, always put me off, and when he had worked me into a state of unbearable curiosity, got bored with me and showed it. He had no use for women; was, I believe, the great sensual brute, secretly vowed to chastity. Perhaps he thought I was in love with him. But that's nonsense! He wasn't at all my kind of man, no, not at all. He was enormous, uncouth, had a ridiculous white fat face, and almost white eyelashes and hair. He was like a walrus; he was like a polar bear; and he's been prowling round the edges of my life for years. He was always just outside it, even when I was a child in California. I didn't know he was there then. I didn't meet him till I was past thirty, and too mixed up with the world, the flesh and the devil in the shape of men, horses and cards, to get out of it. It wasn't likely I'd meet him in a casino or on a race course. But apparently I just missed meeting him a dozen times. He called on my father forty-five years ago in San Francisco. He went through China just ahead of us the year I met

Maggie. I was asked to meet him at lunch in London, two years later, but I was in love with Hugo then, and didn't go to the lunch. It was Hugo who met him. Hugo asked him to call at his office in Whitehall. He was a legendary character by that time, was said to speak half a hundred languages and to know the lands behind the Himalayas better than anyone. Hugo talked to me about him, said "I've met a funny sort of chap, a Finn. We wanted to use him in the East. He turned us down. Made me feel small, devilish uncomfortable. They say he's a Buddhist. We've heard a good deal from some of our chaps out there, seems he's worshipped or the next thing to it, by some of the Mongol tribes. The missionaries are all up in arms against him, but the natives say he works miracles, healing and so on. He admits he knows something about medicine. He told me more facts in half an hour than I could learn in a year's reading, but he'll have nothing to do with us, though I offered him a very liberal salary and he's not got a bob in the world, makes his living peddling things."

He had impressed Hugo. Hugo said—

"I'd like you to meet him. I'd like to know what you think of him." But I didn't meet him, not till later, and I don't know what I think of him. I only know that I cannot forget him, and I think he is responsible for my being here. If it weren't for him I'd be at Longchamps or

Auteuil or Deauville, flirting with the God of Chance, quite adequately entertained by the old game, quite satisfactorily amused by the antics of that little slut, Luck, quite, yes quite sufficiently intent on the turn of a card or the form of a horse not to be bored. Cards and horses are enough, after all, to occupy an old woman. When all else fails one can always fall back on cards and horses, and food and drink and dressmakers and shops. Certainly there was enough to do in Paris. I could have gone on for ever perfectly well, quite automatically. Why didn't I? Well, I'll leave that for the moment. Put it on to Tawaska. It was his doing. He put the idea into my head the last time I saw him. He came to see me in Paris. He was leaving for Finland the next day. I'd not seen him since Maggie's death. I told him about it. He wasn't interested. He didn't seem to think it mattered how Maggie died or how I felt about it. I got angry.

"You're not interested?"

"No, your friend Lady Buckhaven wasn't an interesting woman."

"Why did you come then?"

"I came to see what difference it had made to you."

It was a queer visit, very unpleasant. I'd been playing bridge, the usual four. The other women had gone. The cards were lying on the table, and

some money. I had won several milles, and there were cocktail glasses and teacups about, and the Finn sat there, on a gem of a Louis XV bergère, like an enormous white walrus, exuding an atmosphere of snowfields, and blinked at me, and suddenly I loathed everything. He made the room look false; all my museum pieces became fakes; then I swear the place went dark all at once, the tables and chairs and hangings and pictures were swallowed up in shadow just as if someone had turned the lamps very low, and that enormous cold man was left sitting there, a mass of white flesh with a queer shiny look about him, such as fish have. I can see him now as I saw him then. In fact I can't not see him. His small bright blinking eyes gleam like bits of ice between their white eyelashes. I contemplate his big roughened lips, his large smooth cheeks, faintly marked by smallpox, the close-shaved bullet-shaped head on his huge shoulders. One of his front teeth is missing. He speaks in a soft frosty voice with a sort of lisp. He chuckles. I go hot now when I think how he chuckled when I suggested going with him to Finland.

“Oh no,” he said. “Oh no, that would never do. I’m a peasant there,” he said. “You wouldn’t like it.”

“You’re wrong. I know that I would. I’m sick of this, sick to death.”

“You would be in my way,” he said then.

"No, I wouldn't. I'm not the kind of woman you think."

"But you are," he said. "I know exactly what you are."

Then when I tried to argue with him he got impatient.

"You do not understand. I have no time for you now, and no energy. Once I thought—but I was mistaken. I mistook the time. The times are wrong for us. They have always been wrong. You are discontented now, but I cannot do anything about it. This thing you call life is not interesting. It does not matter what happens to you in it. It is just a sleep. Why should we talk together in our sleep? You are asleep with your eyes not quite closed, slits of white showing. Still you are asleep. All your life you've been asleep. You've been in a dream world, hugging men in your sleep. How many men have had you while you were asleep? How many shadow men have you groped for, dreaming? And you would like me to be one more. But that is impossible. I have never touched a woman." He chuckled softly. I found his chuckle very offensive. Then suddenly he grew serious; his grotesque face became curiously creased; lines were suddenly dug in it.

"The boy," he said, "Lady Buckhaven's boy. You sacrificed him. Doesn't that prove to you?"

"It's a lie," I cried. "I loved David better

than anything on earth."

"Is it?" he whispered. "Did you? Hasn't he been sacrificed? Didn't you watch it happen? What did you do to stop it?"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"About his mother. Didn't you and she kill him between you?"

"He's not dead. He's at Balliol."

"That's another young man."

"How do you know?"

"I went to see him."

"Then you know more about him than I do. I've not seen him. He never writes to me. I've lost him."

"Exactly."

"Does he hate his mother now? Does he hate me?"

"He didn't mention you. He was drunk."

I broke down then. I went off into a loud fit of laughing; couldn't stop. I can see myself now reflected in the mirror, a big swarthy woman in a snaky metallic dress. I see a hard painted face, yelling with laughter, a wide mouth full of teeth, glinting jewels in the creature's ears, on her throat and hands.

Tawaska had done what he came to do. He got up to go. The last thing he said was:

"If you are alone now, as you say you are, why not be alone? Go away from everyone. Cut yourself off from all this." He waved his paws

round the room. "You say your life's finished. See if it's true and if you can stand solitude. Take yourself off in your own solitary company and have a look at yourself. It would be an interesting experiment."

"And you?"

"I am going to Finland. I am experimenting. I am learning to smell and to taste and to hear—and perhaps to see a little. I go to Finland now, for that purpose."

He didn't believe I'd do it. No more did I, but I have done it. That's why I came here, as an experiment, to see what it's like to be alone.

Well, Tawaska is alive, I suppose, somewhere. God knows where. I couldn't get at him if I wanted to. He's probably immortal, but he has left no address. Besides he wouldn't be interested in what I make of all this. He knows already everything that I can find out.

What would interest him is the other story, the one that was going on behind it all, while Maggie and I fell in love, married, grew old, while Hugo was helping to govern England, and Jock was getting into trouble with bookies and Sonia de Castelray. It's written behind these events. I can't tell it because I missed it, only caught a word, at rare, sudden moments. It, I say It. What do I mean by It? The other pattern. It is linked somehow with the web of things I didn't do, with events that never

occurred. I can't explain. There have been small occurrences that didn't fit into the world I shared with Maggie, the world of hunting and racing and gambling and fornicating and eating and drinking and having toothaches and babies. Little things have happened that were out of gear with all this, that produced slight shocks through the whole fabric, changed it all for a second, made everything seem uncanny. Two Mexicans slinking down a white street in Cordova on a blazing hot day. Dark snake men. They produced the tiny convulsion. The street with its Sunday crowd pouring out of the Arena became ghostly. Something very old and evil had obliterated its reality. The focus changed. That's the thing that happens. The world goes to a grey shadow. I'd been to a very messy bull fight with Carlos. We were motoring north from his place in Andalusia. Our little affair had reached its climax with the help of bull fights and flamenco singing, and we were in that state bordering on lunacy which is called being in love. But when the two Mexican half-breeds slunk past our café table it was finished. I left him that afternoon; took the train to Madrid; kept straight on to Paris; never stopped till I got to the top of the Abbé's steep staircase. He was there, and he didn't laugh at me, he listened.

And my relations with Tawaska are an example of what I mean. I didn't have any; we never

became friends; I only saw him half a dozen times, but it ought to have been otherwise. I remember him better now than anyone and think of him more often. In fact I expect him, keep looking out of the window to see if he is coming in at the gate, and although I know this is nonsense that makes no difference. I know we've not finished whatever it was between us. I know just as there was no beginning, so there's no end to it. It's going on, somehow, perhaps literally, at this moment, in some other place, some place I reach in my sleep maybe. Sometimes when I wake in the morning I have a feeling that he's just gone that instant, that I've again just missed him, waked a second too late.

Well, it's no good addressing this letter to him. So there's no one to write to. Nevertheless it is a letter, a one-sided conversation, a personal statement about two women written by one of them in an effort to find out what is left of a life when it's finished.

I don't recognise mine when I look back at it over my shoulder. It is quite different from what I expected it to be. It seemed to me while I lived it, very important. Now it appears a trifling affair. And I'm glad to have done with it. But the worst of it is that I'm not done with it. It's tied to me like a dusty tail. Sometimes I think of it as a strange dog following at my heels, threading its way through the crowd, thirsty, with its

tongue out, hunting for something, I don't know what.

Why did I do so-and-so? Why didn't I do so-and-so? I don't know. I have no answer. But I want an answer.

It is very bewildering to find that there is so little left of one's self. Nothing but scraps. I seem to have forgotten all the important things and to remember only trivial ones. Almost all the intense emotions, for instance, that I believed would last for ever, are clean gone. I remember walking up and down an hotel sitting-room twenty years ago, tearing my handkerchief, grinding my teeth and saying to myself, "I'll never get over this. Never, never," and I can't for the life of me remember what all the fuss was about. It is impossible to get back into the skin of that young creature and suffer again. I can't put together into a single individuality the girl I once was, the woman I became, and the old woman I now am. There seems to be no such individual.

Maggie's case is different. I can live through her experiences as if they were my own, when my own actually are as if they had never been. I like to think that this is simply because I loved her, but it may be that I've made her life into a coherent story, simply because I cannot face so much confusion. We have an insatiable craving it seems, for form, shape, structure. We demand logic of life and a chain of cause and effect. In

my own life I find no logic, but I have pieced Maggie's experiences together into a pattern with a definite design. Looking at it I see it as a complete picture. I can even see that the end of her life followed inevitably from the beginning. I rebel, but recognise, not the moral, but the poetic justice. I see, in other words, that it all fits together. When she dashed into marriage with Bill Travers, then flung him off and ran into the arms of Buck Dawson, she was rushing straight down the course like a nervous little race-horse, for the flag at the end of her particular race. She didn't win, she went all out all the way, had no instinct for saving herself, and dropped at the post. Her last words to me were: "I asked for this." I remember her thin panting sides, the sweat on her forehead, and then the sudden look of startled surprise in her eyes when she was dying. That was the queer thing. She was surprised to find she was actually dying without being able to say good-bye to Buck. She didn't understand, didn't recognise the facts, didn't accept them. She thought—God knows what she thought, but I saw, reflected in that dreadful little look of surprise, a totally different truth about herself, a reality in no way resembling anything anyone else would have called real.

She was invisible to herself as I am invisible to myself. Though she was less self-conscious

than anyone I ever knew, she must have imagined herself to be quite different from what she was. And so she was surprised to find at the last that she had no one but me, and I, yes, I am surprised to find that I am quite alone in the world.

It is very bothering when one is trying to remember, to find out that one cannot see oneself. For I remember in pictures and can never see myself in these pictures. If I conjure up a group round a fire, or in a garden, I can see the other figures, but never my own. That one person is always absent. The wicker chair or the armchair she sat in is there, but it is empty. Now sitting at this writing table I can see my hand, my sleeve, my foot if I put it out, a reflection of my face if I look in the mirror, and that's all. If I could once see myself from top to toe, back and front, what a help it would be. How can I put these bits together, this hand, this foot, that face with the reddish lamplight on half of it and the rest in shadow? Half a face is no good to me. It is so unsatisfactory that I am bound to imagine what I am, and from that I go a step farther and imagine that I am what I want to believe myself to be.

CHAPTER II

ACCURATE knowledge of myself or of anyone: I wonder if I have any. My name is Caroline Merryweather. That is my own name and I don't think of myself as having any other. My father John Merryweather had Indian blood in his veins; my great grandfather, the first John Merryweather to go west from New England, married the daughter of a Pawnee chief. He traded in furs, left five sons who settled on the Pacific seaboard. I come from California, Maggie from Baltimore. We lived astride two centuries and two hemispheres. Our jumping off place was a new country in an old time; our landing place an old country swinging forward like a ship towards a new order of things. We both married Englishmen. She married two, first Bill Travers whom she met in Washington, then Buck Dawson whom she met in Manilla. We took a lot of geography and a lot of history in our stride, Maggie and I: not that we noticed much of it. I noticed more than Maggie, being less gifted for living in the moment, more discordant, more greedy, more curious. I saw New York erupt from the rocks of Manhattan and begin climbing the sky, then saw a world blow to pieces

in Flanders; now the fabric of modern industry that we call our civilisation, seems to be shaking, and I feel the tremor, but we lived our intense burrowing blind little underground lives absorbed in our own affairs as most worms do. And what the effect on us was of being brought up on the Bible in a democratic and tyrannical country where the morals of the log cabin were still the iron standard of conduct, then of being transferred to the strange freedom of stoic, supple, aristocratic England, where the laws that mattered were all unwritten and never explained, I cannot tell in a few words.

I say I came from California, but I did not come straight to this New England village from the shores of the Pacific. I came from Paris by way of China, the Philippines, Italy and England. A long way round and it took me thirty years to do the journey. That is all very well as far as it goes. Those are facts. But how exactly did I get here, and why did it take so long? That is what I want to know.

It is to find out these things that I've come to this raw village where no one knows me, where there are no objects charged with memory, and no mirrors in the guise of familiar faces holding up to me the reflection of what I might be tempted to suppose myself to be. And I've brought nothing with me in the way of souvenirs except David Dawson's photograph taken when he was ten

years old. I keep it locked up in a box.

The only familiar thing in the room is an Aztec head, a stone spear head I picked up in Paris, and this represents something too remote from humanity as I know it, to be used as one of those talismans potent to resuscitate the past for sensitive and imaginative artists.

I am neither sensitive, imaginative, nor in any sense an artist. I am a tough old woman hard to kill, who has been involved in a long struggle with forces that were too much for her. Nor am I setting out to attempt a work of the imagination. On the contrary, I want simply to remember, and to put down exactly what I do remember. Reality is what I'm after, not romance, Maggie's identity and my own, if I've got one.

I say Tawaska is responsible for my coming here. I wonder if that's true. If he was, well, it took me a long time to act. And I don't think I had any definite plans when I left Paris. I just packed up. I don't know why. Homesickness maybe. The ranch in California that my father left me seemed a possible refuge. I'll probably go back there when I leave here. But I don't want to go yet. I'll forget when I do. I'll forget everything. I don't want to do that, not until I've been through this other business of remembering.

The point is that I'm not looking for relief. It is not oblivion that I want, but awareness. If I

am to find out what I want to know, I must do so now before old age makes me more drowsy; and I must do it alone in a place where there is no help.

This village suits my requirements perfectly. It is lonely enough. I am here by accident. I was wandering north towards the Canadian Border in a hired car wondering where to stop when the car broke down. I put up for the night at the hotel, a long wooden affair with a verandah full of rocking chairs, and walked down the village street. There was a sign on the gate of this house saying that it was to let furnished and to inquire at the post office. I did, and took the house.

It is not my kind of house at all. I think I took it for that reason, because it is an antithesis to my life with its remote open spaces of childhood, its crowded middle stage, and its increasing moral disorder. Something prim and stiff about it attracted me. It is a modest little American farmhouse, and I am, I suppose, a big, immodest, reckless woman. Anyhow I feel very cramped in it and its first glance at me was like a snub. Now having lived in it for a month it continues to disapprove of me.

It stands back from the street behind a white gate. It is square with a verandah along one side, and is painted white with green shutters. The whole of it, with its bit of ground at the back, including the fence and the row of sunflowers,

would fit comfortably into Hugo's front hall. I put it there in my mind's eye, with its strip of garden and the back fence. Hugo's vaulted ceiling arches high above Miss Elizabeth Perkins' roof. She doesn't mind. She is unaware of what I am doing. She, the owner of this dwelling, has gone abroad, leaving behind her a canary, a cat, and a large-boned Swedish woman who cooks. They all live in the kitchen. The canary sings maddeningly sometimes, and Joanna cooks very badly, but the cat keeps out of my way, luckily, for I detest cats.

I gather that Miss Elizabeth Perkins is a fussy little woman, and very pious. There are Biblical texts on the walls of the bedrooms, and a collection of saintly books on the shelves. Altogether such an air of delicate propriety pervades the place, that I have given up my after-dinner cigar. I simply haven't the face to light one of my small cheroots in the presence of Miss Perkins' cook, and Miss Perkins' aura, that hovers about her uncomfortable furniture. Perhaps it is just as well. I have an idea that I should be grateful to Miss Elizabeth, as Joanna calls her, for breaking me of this habit. Deprived of my cheroot and my glass of wine, I am truly stranded in the evening; and that, I remind myself, trying to make myself comfortable in my landlady's chair with its high back and short seat, is what I am after. Being uncomfortable tends to keep me

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alert. The fact that the chair is a chair to knit in, and that I have only knitted once in my life, twenty-five years ago, is an irritation that is helpful. I get from it a sharper perception of how little exists in me that is not dependent upon some drug or stimulus.

Joanna tells me that it was the dream of her little mistress's life to go to Europe, but that a bed-ridden parent kept her at home. Now at the age of sixty, it seems that she had been set free to realise her dream. Joanna says that she was all in a flutter when she took the Bangor boat to Boston. She had not been away from the village for thirty years.

Thirty years ago. What was I doing, and where was I? I asked myself, staring out of the window. It didn't take long to discover. Thirty years ago I was in China. My father was dead. We were doing one of our gallops round the world, my mother and I; and I had just met Maggie, Maggie Travers as she was then. We met her in Peking, then a month later she turned up in Hong Kong. She quarrelled with Bill Travers and ran away from him, while we sailed down the Yangtsi Kiang. The old yellow river lies there across the earth like a great drowsy snake. Maggie was twenty-three, and I was three years older. I can see her quite distinctly coming across the stone floor of the hotel in Hong Kong, a skinny young woman in a limp frock, and I

can hear her say abruptly in her hoarse exciting voice:

"Would you mind adopting me as a maid or something and letting me go with you to the Philippines? I've left Bill in Peking, and I don't want him to come after me."

This scene is as distinct as a scene on a stage. And I see it that way. It is as if the hall of the Hong Kong hotel of thirty years ago were removed to a distance of about a hundred feet, with the map of Europe, Suez and the Straits of Singapore spread out in between. Maggie and my beautiful mother do not seem to be here in Miss Elizabeth Perkins' room with me, but just outside it. The wall opens and I see them through the aperture the other side of the earth, in rattan chairs with palms behind them in pots. I see the defiant look in Maggie's eyes, the determined set of her mouth and the quick laughter that followed, moulding her irregular face to a winsomeness that even my mother, who strongly disapproved of her conduct, could not resist. My mother is in white with puffed sleeves, and a long white veil hanging from her hat. Myself I cannot see, but I observe the punkah swinging back and forth overhead and watch a China boy bringing glasses of lemonade on a tray, with his pigtail tucked into his trouser pocket. And I remember the medley of sounds coming up through the open windows from the harbour. The clacking of

tongues and the tapping of wooden shoes made a soft rushing clatter as if a stream of pebbles were being poured into the town from a bucket in the sky.

Joanna tells me that Miss Elizabeth is doing the Château country. She is standing in a neat bonnet and cloak on the banks of the Loire, a Baedeker in her hand. I see her small stiff figure in the distance. I am sure she is very happy realising her dream. She peers up at the battlements of Chenonceau and, as she looks, a racing car whizzes past along the road. There's a woman in it called Caroline Merryweather and a Frenchman called Philippe. They are friends for the moment, intimate friends, at least so it seems, for they don't mind doing things together that one usually does quite alone in the strictest privacy. But in a few months they'll be strangers again, and wonder why they wanted so much to be together. Miss Elizabeth doesn't see the car shaped like a torpedo that flashes past and disappears. The time is wrong for her to see it. It is 1930 for her: it was nineteen-twenty when they passed, but I see them at the same spot on the road.

Life: I shall talk about Life. I'm going to write about mine, Maggie's, Buck Dawson's, Jock Bailey's; not about Tawaska's. I don't know about his. I don't think what he seemed to be doing, was what he was really doing. I don't

think even the splendid things or awful things were important. They were trifles. The few facts I've gleaned about him and the stories I've heard, don't establish his identity. His father was a peasant, I believe, and had a farm in Finland, his mother was a Russian. He, Tawaska, worked his way through school to the University of Petrograd, lived there as a student, in extreme poverty, was involved in a bomb-throwing episode, fled to Switzerland, and made a living for a bit as a man nurse in a mental hospital in some town on the Lake of Geneva. He must be twelve or fifteen years older than I am, for he was in California engaged in the dried fruit business when I was twelve. From California he went to China. A big very white man, almost an Albino, had been through ahead of us. He was walking across Asia, they said in Peking when my mother and I got there in 1898. He spent some years in Thibet before or after, I don't know which, before, it must have been, if Hugo saw him in London in 1901. He'd had smallpox and typhus by that time. Later he was in a cholera epidemic in India and nursed a dying village, alone, so the story went, and dug a hundred and thirty graves with an iron shovel. But when the Indian Government wanted to thank him he had disappeared. He could disappear just like that. Simple people called it magic; others less simple declared that in spite of his vast bulk he could

make himself invisible in the middle of a crowded room. Lawrence of Arabia talks, I think, about the same thing. Tawaska would chuckle when asked about it and wave his paws and say in his comical lisping voice: "One of my tricks." Another was thought reading. He'd found out how to practise telepathy in the Swiss Hospital and to do other queer things. Some of the great Swiss Psychotherapists were his cronies.

Once he said of a noted nerve specialist: "He and I have little games. We meet just for fun—just by way of experiment. When he is in Zürich and I am somewhere, London, Vienna, Bombay, we lie down and shut our eyes, and go quickly; fly away, like little birds to each other. It is not very difficult if you know how." He laughed softly. "You do not believe," he said, "you cannot understand. It is a pity but it cannot be otherwise, for you are in the trance that you call Life. That is why you do not join me, you do not know how. You think that if you took a railway ticket and made the decision to be poor and chaste and obedient to me, that you could follow me. But that is a mistake. You cannot even decide to get on the train. I follow you always, I know, whenever I like what you are doing, though you do not know that I am there. Sometimes it makes you restless. You say, what a dismal day, how queer everything is, how the wind howls. You do not know it is Tawaska

whispering in your ear, trying to wake you; and sometimes in the night when you are asleep, your body tosses about, is twisted and thrown from side to side of the bed, but you do not know that I am speaking to you, and that you are trying to get out of your body and join me and cannot do so. And so when you get up in the morning you feel exhausted and restless, that's all you feel; and now you think that I am talking nonsense. Well, I will tell you a little fact about yourself that no one knows but me. You thought no one in the world knew it. The night after your wedding you got out of bed in your sleep and went into the bathroom and picked up your husband's razor and opened it and went back to where he lay in the big hotel bed, and then you woke up and found yourself standing beside him with the clean sharp thing in your hand and you were very frightened."

And that was true. It happened in the hotel in Paris where Jock Bailey and I went on our honeymoon.

I do not pretend to understand Tawaska. I only know that he was different, that he could do certain things most men cannot do, and that he did not do the usual things. So he is separate. That was one of the things he wanted, to be quite separate. He tolerated no ties. The idea of having a wife and children made him smile, though he loved children. He chose to be home-

less and chose to be poor. His possessions were contained untidily in a battered bag and a small tin trunk. They included, surprisingly, a tail coat and some stiff shirts. He could go without washing for a winter, and did so in the Arctic. He could appear decently clothed at a dinner table in London, though his coat never fitted his enormous bulk very well, and his shirt would ruck up over his huge chest. This didn't worry him. Nothing worried him. His being was concentrated on a definite unattainable objective. He needed, he said, all his energy, for purposes that had nothing to do with the world. He'd got rid of the world. He said the impulse of the Bolsheviks was in the right direction. The world was nonsense. Civilisation was trash. Money was a lie. To get rid of money you had to destroy the world. They wouldn't succeed. It was a biological law that all living things were compelled to make themselves comfortable. If they couldn't find a way of being comfortable in their surroundings they perished. If they succeeded in achieving a certain degree of comfortableness, they felt they had secured the maximum life offered and promptly went to sleep. "It is true," he said, "life offers nothing better than stupor or pleasant dreams."

"Then what do you hope to gain, Tawaska?"

"Nothing. I don't hope. To hope is childish. I work. I am working to get out-

side Life. I work on myself."

"How?"

"I cannot tell you. You would not understand." Then reluctantly, "We live in an iron mechanism. When you lift your hand, it is because a wire pulls it up. When you fall asleep on your bed, an iron fist fells you. The sort of sleep you enjoy is a blow on the brain from an iron fist. If you could go without sleep for a year, or even a month, you might find out something. It is the same with eating. You eat because a steel claw scrapes at your vitals, empties your stomach, pries open your mouth. If you could go without food or drink but still control your nerves and muscles——"

"Can you do that?"

"No, no, I cannot. But I work, I experiment."

We lived, so we'd say, Maggie and I. Tawaska wouldn't agree. He'd say that we never lived, were nothing but automatons. Anyhow there are two separate things. There is my life and there is Life, the big physical power pursuing its way on the earth, carrying out a plan that has no use for individuals, wants no individuals to exist. It got hold of Maggie, used her, then tossed her on the scrap heap. I was tougher, it hasn't done with me yet, not quite. But it's the enemy, that's the point. Everyone's enemy. We're all in the same fix. Sleep-walkers, groping blind men, wrestling with a monstrous antagonist. Every-

thing it does to us is an attack. Everything that happens to us is a trap. I don't mean merely that we are born, whether we like it or not, to grow old and die and have a bad time of it generally. I don't mean only that we're bound to lose everything we care for. It is much more than that. I think that everything Life, the big brute gives us, every experience, every pleasure, as well as every disappointment, is a trick to hoodwink us, is a move against us, against our rousing ourselves out of the dream. It's as if Life were a great magician mixing stimulants and sedatives in exactly the right proportion to keep human beings in the proper state of stupor for its own uses.

And by my life, I refer to something different from the procession of my days. I think I mean my effort, but effort for what? And if I say my failure, failure in what? Not in finding happiness. It was never meant to be a search for happiness; that much is certain. Perhaps a childish way of putting it is best. Call it my effort to be good, or, if that sounds too simple, my attempt to respond to a summons outside Life. In any case I know that an interesting proposition was put to me when I was born, and a task set, and that this had nothing to do with happiness.

Then there's the world, the big, gorgeous world, so much bigger than Life that one cannot find a

proper comparison. Turn over a rotten log, watch the insects scuttle, compare their outlook to the boundaries of the State of California or of the Continent of America. Life's a small unclean worm crawling for a moment on a minute fragment of the world, a very ephemeral thing, probably a slight cosmic error.

Funny to think that all our ideas are due to the fact that we are minute, mechanical creatures existing in the body of a worm that is going to perish.

Well, I've lived in the Life-worm, on a speck called the earth, and have found it a vast, crowded, immense place seething with creatures like myself. I have been round and round it, up and down it, and now I'm alone. But if I put out the lamp and sit in the dark, the crowds begin at once to surge across the map, with the light of morning, of midday and of sunset sweeping over them. Here and there, now and then, a tiny figure steps out of the crowd, comes towards me, the figure of a man or a woman. It advances, grows bigger, looms large like a figure in a fog. For a moment I see it close, then it comes too close, goes out of focus, fades into me, passes through me, disappears, and the crowd begins again to pour across the picture. The crowds pouring over the earth worry me. I want to remember myself and Maggie, to follow our footsteps, to find out why I took this turn and that,

why she did the same. But instead of the big striding figure of a woman called Caroline Merryweather, or the small determined figure of a woman called Maggie Buckhaven, I see long roads thronged with faceless people, roads of the east, white and red, damp red roads of Singapore, white burning roads of India, mountain roads, roads skirting the shores of hot seas, all thronged with figures, bare-foot, dusty, wearily hurrying; and roads of the west, motor roads and railroads, long straight roads of France bordered by high poplars and the deep winding labyrinthian roads of England with people eternally, interminably passing up and down them. Why? What's it all about? You there, Caroline Merryweather in a rickshaw, a bullock cart, a buckboard; on a horse, in a dog cart, a motor car, where were you going, what were you looking for; why were you in such a hurry? And why are you now alone?

CHAPTER III

It is very quiet in this room. I think the queer stillness has something to do with time. It's as if a great clock had stopped. Nothing is going to happen. That is why it is so quiet.

I am expecting no one, nothing, to-night, to-morrow or the day after. Every day is the same. There is no to-morrow. There's just a day and a night, a circle wheeling from light to dark, to light to dark; just alternating light and dark.

No one knows my address except my bankers. I get no letters. No one is going to knock on the door with a telegram. Nothing will happen. Joanna has gone to bed. Miss Elizabeth's cat and the canary are asleep in the kitchen. The big wind is awake, the big, young, summer wind of North America that I knew as a child, and the Atlantic is murmuring against the rocks down on the point, but these are outside. They belong to the big world; they have nothing to do with me; I don't want to listen to them. I'm going back into the past. It opens under me like a cellar. There's nothing ahead; the future's a blank wall, but the past's a dim cavern and I'm going down into it with my memory for a lantern

to see what I can find. Real objects, though, that's what I'm looking for, solid things that don't crumble or vanish when I touch them. No ghosts for me, or piles of ashes or whirls of dust, but recognisable belongings, things that were mine and still are mine, things I could swear to in a court of law; facts.

I don't know if the fact of my Indian blood is important. Hugo seemed to think so. He said when I told him, "So that's it."

"That's what?" I said.

"The explanation of you, my dear, and of your strange attraction for me. It's your blood."

Hugo thought blood as important in men as in horses. No one, he said, who'd ever had anything to do with breeding racehorses could get away from the fact of blood. Well, Maggie and I weren't in the book. Her mixture was Irish and Dutch, mine English, Red Indian and Scandinavian. My mother's people were Swedes. They farmed in Minnesota. The Merryweathers came from Kent. They were Kentish yeomen. My mother was as fair as my father was dark. The Redskin in him was unmistakable, but I would pass anywhere for an Italian or a Spaniard. A tall, dark, thin woman, all dark except for my eyes. These are a very light grey. Big, prominent, with a good deal of white eyeball showing, set wide apart and wide open between brown eyelids, they give me, I think, a startling, rather

savage look, like a snarl. Their effect is, I think, the same as that of a mouth with the lips drawn back over bared teeth. My mouth does that too sometimes. This is one of the things about me, I suppose, that has put a good many people off, just as Maggie's friendly grin made everyone like her. Otherwise there's nothing unusual about my looks. I've what's called a beak nose, strong white pointed teeth, long legs and a flat back. I've never looked young and I don't now look old. My hair is still black, my face lean and only faintly lined. My feet and hands are my best points. They are well made and serviceable. Good hands for a horse, good feet for tramping. I've been told ever since I can remember, till I'm sick of the sound, that I ought to have been a man. In Paris they said I ought to be a Lesbian. That sort of remark bores me to frenzy. I've always been more interested in women than men, but I don't fit into any category of sex freaks that I know of; and abnormality makes me feel slightly sick. This is, perhaps, the result of my early Christian teaching. I've lost sight of the God my old Nanny told me about, but I fear damnation, fear, that is, the consequences of conduct. The result is peculiar. I've lived for pleasure but I've spoiled my own fun. I'm incurably interested in right and wrong. I know my moral prejudices are conventional; I envy the women like Sonia who have none, but

I've never got rid of mine. Every time I break one of the elementary Christian rules I feel guilty. So I've spent my life in a futile struggle and I've lived with a number of men, though I never really enjoyed doing it. I resented what they did to me; I resent it now in retrospect. Even now my battered old body flushes with a vague feeling of shame, when I think of it all.

I'm getting on for sixty and am still as strong as a horse. I can walk all day and lie awake most of the night without getting tired, but the mechanism of my emotions is tired. That part of the machine is running down. It is only at rare intervals that I experience a strong sense of terror, a stab of regret, or a sharp reminder of the capacity for joy that I once possessed. On the other hand I see the ordinary things round me differently. This village street and the people who go up and down it stand out as if lighted by a very strong light. The kind of brilliance one notices an hour before sunset. God knows it's a raw ungainly little place, but from somewhere, out of the blue, there's a great shining beauty spread over it. It is as if now, at last, when it's too late, when I no longer want anything from the world, or expect anything, I can at last see it. In any case my eye is clear, my hand steady, and my mind seems to me to work with a deadly precision. It is only my memory that plays me tricks.

I cannot remember what I want to remember. Pictures flash up out of the shadow, again and again; the same ones. Why these and not others? Voices sound out of the distance. Words, phrases, scraps of conversation come back to me. Sometimes I cannot identify the voice with anyone I ever knew. Out of the immense blended murmur of all the voices I've heard why do these go on sounding? I do not understand the process of selection that goes on. It goes on in spite of me, but I shall write down the things I remember and they will make a story and I will call it mine. All the same I know that I've forgotten a hundred incidents for each one that pokes its head up, and I know that if my memory had selected other facts from the mass, the story would be quite different and a different group of people would step from its pages.

I can divide my life into sections if I think of it in a certain way, but it doesn't divide itself that way naturally. Artificially the division is this. First section: childhood in California. A big dark silent man and a quiet powerful Swiss woman are the principal figures. My mother was seldom at home but Anna Schwartz never left me for more than a few hours during twelve years. She was there when I went to bed and there when I woke in the morning. She nursed me through measles, whooping cough and scarlet fever. She saw to it that I brushed my teeth twice a day.

She taught me to be incredibly modest; she taught me that lying was abominable, vanity ridiculous, greed disgusting and sex ugly; she taught me these things with obstinate patience, imprinting the lessons on my mind daily year after year, and she put the fear of God into me, and I loved her. She was big and tranquil, and happy, for she had no imagination; and the care of a child satisfied her simple nature. So she taught me to fear God and the devil, but was not afraid herself, and was delighted with childish pleasures, little games and songs. We used to sing all the old German songs at the schoolroom piano: "O Tannenbaum" and "Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht" and "Kennst du das Land wo die Citronen blühn?" Christmas was her great day. She adored the festival. She and I always trimmed the Christmas tree, hung wreaths of holly in the windows of the house, and hung up our stockings at night by the nursery fireplace. I remember the smell of evergreen permeating the rooms, the enchantment of the gay Christmas shops, and Nanny Ann on a ladder fastening an angel with silver wings to the straight top twig and squealing with pretended fright. Poor Nanny Ann—she left me when I was twelve, confident that I would not forget her teaching.

The background of my childhood has a brilliant sweep. The dry sierras loom in a dazzling distance. The silvery Pacific is immense and som-

nolent. My father's big ugly early Victorian house stands on a bluff above it outside San Francisco. It has a conservatory full of exotic plants, an aquarium of multi-coloured fish and a swimming pool. Then there's a ranch with an adobe house and several thousand acres of grass for horses and cattle up a long hot road that leads to the mountains and the dry, sharp-scented pine forests. I spent my holidays there with my father and Nanny Ann till I was twelve. Then one day someone said of me in my mother's presence, "Caroline looks like a wild Indian," and I was packed off to a school in New York, my nurse dismissed, and that was the end of my childhood.

Second section: globe-trotting with my mother. The earth going round and round. Japan, China, the Philippines, Egypt, India and all the countries and capitals of Europe, shaken together into a noisy clattering mixture of finishing schools and hotels. My mother, spotless, serene, statuesque, in rickshaws, on elephants and camels, in deck chairs and landaus. Maggie appears on the scene in Peking, grins at me across a dinner table, sweeps me into her wild little life with Buck Dawson, and I break, as a result, with my mother.

Third section: England. Hunting and racing and the Boer War. Deep green fields, deep brown ploughed fields, hounds running, the huntsman's horn sounding, white railed paddocks. Hugo in

the centre of a paddock talking to his trainer and jockey. Newmarket in the early morning, watching the gallops with Hugo. London going dark, England going dark. My first dark, hidden love affair during the Boer War. Four years with Hugo, then five years with Jock. But Maggie remains the dominating figure till David comes along.

Fourth section: Paris. Marcella Mackintosh and her gang of millionaire bandits. Hot circus life. Jazz, night clubs, casinos. Luxurious squalor of my beautiful old hotel in the Rue de Varenne. A cocktail shaker figures largely and a bridge table. Sonia takes the stage. The little Abbé is an antidote to Monte Carlo and Biarritz and Trouville. I am a celebrity because I have a husband doing time in Parkhurst. Cards and lovers vie with horses for my attention. I remember the aces and kings on the poker and bridge tables, the nines and the eights at baccarat, not the lovers. The little red and black pips on the white cards on the green tables wink up at me. How they used to flirt with me, tease me, convulse my sides with sudden spasms of delight or rage, but the men I took up with are gone. They are ghosts. I can't see their faces. There seems to be something very fluid about faces. Faceless men, hugged in sleep. I never, I suppose, saw them as I saw horses and cards or for that matter a host of other objects.

If I don't divide my life with some conventional notion about a succession of events as a starting point, it's not at all like this. Just now, it seems to be static as a room with four walls, entirely crammed with inanimate objects. They crowd out the people altogether; and a description of my past would read something like an auctioneer's inventory. Houses, all sorts of houses, a hunting box in Leicestershire, a town house in London, another in Paris, a villa on the Riviera, a place in Scotland, all full of furniture. Beds! How many beds furnish the lumber room? Monster four-posters, brass beds and iron beds, camp beds and feather beds and beds encased in mosquito nets. Stairs too, they are aggressive, they climb and wind, and bottles, innumerable bottles catch the light on glass shelves of bathrooms, and there are hundreds of pots of face cream, and shoes of every description, and clothes enough to fill an aeroplane shed, and saddlery and dogcarts and motors and books and notepaper. Books full of print I once read and have forgotten, notepaper covered with scrawled words I once wrote and cannot recall. Pens, pencils, cigarettes, cigars, wine. Tobacco and wine. What is more important in my past than these? Nothing. They take up more space than anything. If I could measure the gallons of wine I've poured down my gullet, collect the smoke from the hundred thousand cigarettes and cheroots I've held in my mouth, I'd

have a lake of Burgundy, shrouded in tobacco smoke like a fog.

So how can I sort out anything? I can't. It's impossible. This story can't be a veridical account of anything that really happened. It is all too confused. Suppose I start to chase Maggie's little ghost through the lumber-room, among the bottles and the pony traps, or brushing aside all those objects, try to track her down in the open, across the years? How can I be sure that she went that way and not this way? I cannot be sure, and my picture of her life is therefore bound to be a picture of something that had no existence until now, however conscientious I am.

For even Maggie, whom I remember more vividly than anyone, except David Dawson and Tawaska, even she with her scrawny angular grace, her abrupt flashing laughter and her look of a harsh hardened elf, is less solid than these inanimate objects. Houses, as I've said, remain when their inmates have vanished, whole streets of houses, front doors, bells I rang. I can see the steps, the knockers, the bell-knobs, but whom was I going to see behind the doors? I don't know, I can't remember, and it's the same to a less degree with Maggie. I remember things that belonged to her more accurately than her own self. Her hats are more definite than her face. Indeed I can't see her separate from her clothes, her furniture, her husband, her four boys. Always I see

her surrounded, embedded, mixed up with the stuff of her world. To visualise her, I must put her in a frame. I can see her in the schoolroom at Buckhaven Park romping with the boys, or at the tea-table in the big hall, or half way up the stairs, laughing over the balustrade. The more dramatic moments are more blurred. It's the same with all emotional crises. I can't contemplate them, can't indeed see myself in any act of intense emotion. Striving to see such things I go suddenly blind.

People often say, "Life is a dream." They don't mean it literally as Tawaska did, but suppose it were literally true. Suppose the whole of my life had been truly a kind of troubled sleep, sluggish mostly, but feverish at times, with periods of nightmare. Certainly the things I have done, I seem to have done in a dream, and the people I've loved seem like dream people, and strangely enough, yet naturally enough if I was asleep all the time, the moments of highest emotional excitement appear to have been the moments of deepest delirium, when I thought myself most alive but was most unconscious. If this were true, it would explain why such moments have left no clear imprint in my memory.

I cannot, for instance, recall to any sort of reality the experiences that I must call love affairs. Nothing remains of such episodes except the background, the shadowy forms of men whose faces

I've forgotten, and the skeletons of my gestures. And these, stripped of their emotional wrappings, appear ugly, ridiculous and highly irrational. But though I can't remember in the least what it felt like, being in love, I can remember the surroundings of passion and this scenery affects my nerves, in a special way. Romance would seem to reside in places, not people.

There's a house near Seville. It belonged to Carlos. It had a tiled patio and cedarwood ceilings. My bedroom had whitewashed walls; a black Madonna stood in a niche; heavy clusters of wisteria drooped at the windows. Every detail of the room is clear as a Dutch painting. The bed is rigid, and the crucifix above it. I can trace again the pattern on the high painted head-board, see my watch, my pearls and my open book in the lamplight on the table beside it, but the man in the bed is faceless. I can see the top of his head. It is an object like my watch and my necklace, remembered because I can remember the lamp and the arrangement of things in its circle of light, but I cannot see him, and I cannot recall the emotions he aroused. Perhaps he did not arouse them. It may be that he had little to do with it. The scents in the garden were strong and heady. I almost get a whiff of those summer nights and burning days in Andalusia. It was near the town where Cortez started for the West Indies and Mexico. Almost I could confuse my

vanished lover with one of the followers of that old adventure. There are characters walking my world who have come out of history and out of the realm of the imagination, who seem more real to me than many people I have known.

Time has crept after me as night creeps up a mountain valley, filling the past with darkness and obliterating my footsteps. I remember climbing the Sierras, south of Granada, one summer evening, pursued by such a rising shadow. The little towns below me, tucked beneath the great rocks in the twilight, lay like clusters of shells under water. Far below in the shadowy plain was a lost village we had passed in the morning. Isabella the Catholic had once caught up Christopher Columbus there to tell him that he might after all set out on his voyage. I can now see the Queen Isabella, and Christopher Columbus, quite as clearly as many of my friends. Four hundred years or a single lifetime, a face forgotten or one never seen, it all comes to much the same thing. We people the world with imaginary beings, and I have hurried up the sides of life, stumbling from each day towards an imagined to-morrow, unaware of the real world round me, while Time has wrapped the yesterdays one by one in forgetfulness. I look back and down from the bare ledge of to-day. I discern a wide panorama streaked with light and dark, the faint outlines of blurred masses. Clouds pass and the shadows of clouds,

obscuring distant familiar landmarks. Were these the great events, the absorbing interests, and the violent passions of my life? If so, I do not recognise them.

It is not my object in writing to make them recognisable and to fit them into some preconceived notion of my own. My purpose is to describe my remembered world, as I see it now, and I don't much like that last bit about the mountain ledge, it's too easy. It smacks of humbug.

Another of the tricks my memory plays me, is to withdraw suddenly and let imagination take its place, for I seem to remember things that I couldn't possibly have seen, that happened at a distance quite out of range of my life, years before I was born, perhaps, or in places I've never been to. When I think, for instance, of San Francisco in the late eighties, I remember that Tawaska was there, and I seem to remember him calling on my father at the bank. This trick of memory is so convincing that I actually see the Finn sitting opposite my father's desk. As a matter of fact, I can't see the room or the desk, or the swivel chair, without him, though the truth is that I never saw him there and never heard of him till twenty years later.

Many of my childish memories are of this sort, mixtures of recalled fact and imagination. That Indian squaw, my great-grandmother, haunts a camping ground in the Sierras where my father

and I used to go sometimes. I see her standing in the firelight against the dark trees wrapped in a blanket and smiling. I see her black eyes and white teeth, her braided hair, and I watch my father cleaning his gun while he talks to her. And then softly, suddenly, the forest separates, there's an opening in the trees, and I see far off across the valley, with the forests like a silvery sea spread out in the moonlight, a lovely city standing in a lake, the old city of Mexico. It is morning there. A brilliant sun is blazing and a throng is gathered before the temple of the War God of the Aztecs. And I see a priest clad in feathers climbing the stairs to the high tower of the temple with a knife in his hand, and this picture is as real to me as the Indian snake dances I did actually go to see with my father.

So how can I trust my memory and swear that this or that is true?

The Merryweather women were always great globe-trotters. Californians often are. They treat the earth as a ball that one twirls round under one's toes. They take a wide, swift view of the distance separating them from the rest of the world, and make up their minds to ignore it. If you choose to ignore the Pacific Ocean and the Continent of North America they cease to be barriers of any consequence. My mother hopped on ships to Yokohama and trains to New York,

as casually as Londoners in the Strand hop on buses bound for the City or Kensington. And she took me with her. The excuse she gave was my education. She used to deposit me in a school somewhere for three months or so. Before I was eighteen I had spent a winter in Rome, a winter in Florence, and a year in Paris. We usually came home for Christmas and in the summer. Sometimes my father would come to fetch us.

We are a large tribe. My relatives own a good deal of California and some copper mines and railways, so that the money involved in these excursions was not a consideration. There was no reason, since my father made no objection, why my mother shouldn't do whatever she liked. She was a very beautiful woman, and rather a silly one, though she did not appear so to me. In many ways she was a child, and she had the charm of a child, an innocent candour, an unconscious selfishness. She was fond of my father but she left him a great deal. The lure was the distant world of fashion. She found a romantic fascination in the conventional brilliance of the capitals of Europe and had a naïve belief in the benefits of "foreign culture."

My father did not as a rule accompany us on these journeys, though he occasionally turned up from California in London or Rome or Paris for a few days. Distances meant even less to him than to us. He was constantly moving between

the Atlantic and Pacific seabards, but Europe bored him. He had nothing to do there, and was as out of the picture as a North American buffalo. I do not connect him with our life abroad. I do not connect him with my mother's life at all. They belonged to different worlds. But I can see him with my hand in his, standing before the Colosseum at Rome, his head thrown back, looking up silently.

I took his importance in the world for granted. He had very large preoccupations but my curiosity was not aroused by the fragments of talk I overheard dealing with salmon fisheries in Alaska, oil wells in Mexico, a possible water supply to be piped over the mountains for the town of Los Angeles, or the new shipping line to Yokohama. The words Klondike, Panama, Union Pacific, Southern Pacific, North Western, come back to me with a suggestion of romance they could not have had for my young indifferent ears. It was only towards the end of his life that I woke up to the interest of these wide activities and rebelled at leaving him.

I didn't rebel enough, and I did always leave him to go with my mother. I remember the last time I had a chance to choose. He was going to Mexico over some oil deal; my mother was bound for Paris; our trunks were packed. Usually he said nothing, but that day he did ask me to stay with him. "What would you say to giving Paris

the go-by this time, Lina, and going to Mexico with me instead?" He was standing by the big plate glass library window, looking out at the sea, his huge shoulders hunched, his hands in his pockets. I put my arm through his. There was a fog coming in. We watched it rolling towards us over the water, soft, sinister and white. I remember the smell of his coat. My mother's voice sounds again behind me. "What are you two doing there?" She was beautiful, obstinate and spoiled. There was a scene. I remember looking from one to the other. I remember the languor coming over his face, the triumph shining in hers. and how the fog flowed up round the house while she got her way again, how it obliterated everything; I could see nothing beyond the window, nothing. I knew that he loved me better than anything in the world, and I think I loved him very much! I do now.

He died two years later. I scarcely saw him during the last two years of his life. We were in New York when the telegram came saying he was ill. We'd just landed. I remember the dreadful journey. Wires were handed to my mother at Cleveland, Chicago, Denver. We arrived too late. He was dead. After that we went away again for good. My mother never would go back.

CHAPTER IV

THIS trying to remember is a torturing business. When I concentrate on the people I've loved, the whole shadowy past goes fluid. It becomes a dark flooded cave with tides sweeping in and out; deep incomprehensible currents make whirling eddies in it, and the ray of my lantern touches this person, then that, only for an exasperating second. Bobbing, submerged heads, bits of bodies, a hand, a foot; they are carried back and forth across the beam of memory like helpless drowned things, and I cannot hold them still, and their faces, floating past down there, are blurred as if by the sucking wash of water. And yet while I strain to see, reach down, grab and hold up to view a lost cherished face, I am aware that the dark surging flux is all a mistake, just another failure of my own, simply another instance of blindness, and I am conscious of the complete past world, spreading round me immense and still, just out of range of my eyes, with everything in it that I ever knew existing for ever. Where does it exist? In what space or place? Printed on the neurons of my brain, they'd say, the psychologists, or mirrored, but from below, in the deep of the subconscious mind. The other side of the looking glass; it's like that. If I go round, get behind, there's no-

thing, but they're all there, all the same, all the friends I've ever had and all the strangers I've seen too, the people I've passed in streets and travelled with in trains. The unnoticed crowds are still walking the pavements, the trains are still travelling over the sunlit and darkened earth. If a magician pressed the right spot behind my eyes, I would see the Simplon Express and the Orient Express rushing across Europe, roaring into tunnels under great mountains. At the same time, each train is standing in a railway station, and the attendant of the wagon-lits is taking my ticket, and I am smoking a cigarette in my little lighted compartment, and Hugo is by the rails of a green paddock in Newmarket, watching a string of horses file past. There goes his lovely filly, Emerald Queen, lifting daintily her four white feet. She's going to win the Two Thousand Guineas, and she knows it, and I stand beside Hugo, his girl lover who loved him too soon, and Jock is in the offing, his hands in his pockets, a cigarette dangling from his sardonic mouth, with the woman whom he married, the same girl, coarsened, with a harder face and a rougher voice. And off across country a small boy in grey shorts and a grey flannel shirt, is standing in a sunny road between hedges of hawthorn, waving good-bye. He stands there in the sun waving to me as I whirl away. He will always be there, always, waving good-bye.

Everything is for ever if I don't look too close. I am rushing through the night to Venice and to Constantinople. I am in my cabin on the *Aquitania* bound for New York. Across the American continent, my mother's pretty things lie scattered in her boudoir. Her jewels glint on her dressing-table, her blonde tortoise-shell toilet set catches the light in the little pools and her satin slippers stand at the end of her chaise longue by the window. Beyond it lies the Pacific, and in the distance, at a distance of forty times three hundred days, my father is galloping across the prairie pursued by a running prairie fire. And I am crossing the Yellow Sea with my mother in a blizzard and am sitting in a victoria beside Maggie in Manilla, with Buck Dawson opposite, and the Filipino Orchestra is playing an air from *Cavalleria Rusticana* while the sun sets behind the battleships that are at anchor in the bay. The strains of the melody are still floating across the water to Cavite; the palms are still whispering. If I don't strain my ears, I can almost hear them. It is all there, here, somewhere; strangely, subtly present, very near and very far away, so close, but just out of reach. I must be absolutely still, make no slightest movement, or it will dissolve again, the entralling, haunting, beautiful, harrowing and bewildering world that exists now, always, and yet is gone. Life has destroyed it for me.

Years and groups of years have a definite colour and quality. Some are dark, some pale and shrouded in mist. The landscape of my childhood has a fantastic charm. It is touched with magic. It glimmers like a mirage. But China and the Philippine Islands in 1898 when Maggie and I met, became friends, and both fell in love with Buck Dawson, that emotional, romantic year has the quality of a Drury Lane melodrama. It is made of musical comedy stuff and its appeal is the same as that of a revue at the London Pavilion. Strange that a grim enduring passion should have been started on such a stage. It is unsuitable and interesting that Maggie's life with Buck should have begun, disguised as a very ordinary flirtation of the languid tropics. That I should have fallen in love with Lieutenant Dawson on the flagship of the British squadron that was visiting the new American naval station, makes me laugh. I laugh because it was such an obvious thing to do. Love raged on those Islands like a fever, and I got the fever, and fell heavily, oh so awkwardly and painfully, for the English sailor who had already turned the heads of half the women in Manilla. My first love affair; it lasted a week and was all on my side. Buck dropped me the instant Maggie appeared. A disconcerting experience for that haughty girl, myself. She must have been a ghastly prude and a horrid bore. I don't wonder she wasn't a success with the American Navy.

I can imagine how she must have looked in the unbecoming clothes her mother chose for her, sprigged muslins and organdies, her dark thin face and arms sticking out of frills and ribbons, her queer eyes glaring with puritanical disapproval at the joyful, bibulous American sailors.

I go hot now when I think of how I seized a young man's third cocktail out of his hand and poured it over the rail of the loggia. I'm sure I did worse things. Indeed I must have been a great trial to our hostess, the warm-hearted Southern wife of the Naval Commandant, and I'm sure she must have asked that accomplished man of the world, Lieutenant Dawson, who was her "cavaliere-servente," to be nice to me, for he wasn't the kind to take pity on a gawk of a girl unprompted.

What surprises me is that Maggie should have liked me. I asked her, years afterwards why she did. She said she didn't know, she supposed she was sorry for me. I looked a bit wild, she said, and angry and seemed lonely. "You were an unhappy girl, Lina, angry with the world. The way you glared at me across the table scared me at first, but then you laughed that short, savage laugh of yours, and I liked that."

Everything else disappears as I write this. There is nothing between me and that far off Christmas dinner table in the British Legation in Peking, where I first saw Maggie's face smiling at me in the light of those Christmas candles. It is just

there, a few feet away. If I put out my hand, if I am very careful, if without looking up from this paper I reached out, couldn't I touch her round head, almost—almost?

The British had, I think, already occupied Wei-hai-wei. The Russians were at Port Arthur. We had come into China from the north, my mother and I, crossing the Yellow Sea in a blizzard in a small Japanese boat. We landed at Dairin. Mongols wrapped in furs were rattling up and down in droskies. I recall a sense of Manchuria and Siberia spreading away to the north and north-west, great icebound tracts of silence. In Peking there was talk of the Germans' lease of Kiaochow, and a vague uneasiness over the situation, but no one present at that Christian festival, eating turkey and plum pudding in the heart of China's ancient capital, had any warning of what was coming. If the Boxer Rebellion cast a shadow, it loomed unnoticed behind the figures of the enigmatic Chinese servants. They did not attract a suspicious scrutiny any more than the gilt dragons faintly gleaming on the painted ceiling. The Legation was to be besieged a year later with Bill Travers and several others present inside it, but I don't remember them. I've a vague recollection of a high harsh voice, that must have been Travers, talking, but I can't see him at the table. I can see indeed no one distinctly except Maggie and of course my mother. My mother

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was in white that night with diamonds in her hair.

Maggie's image lacks my mother's stability. Her heart-shaped face flashed before me just now, then disappeared, now comes back again. An irregular, changeable, provoking face. I have to be quick and I am quick, and I catch again the comical charm of her wide boyish grin. For a moment she's a clown, an Irish waif. She's a haggard woman of the world, the next, with monstrous, deep, wise eyes. Then suddenly she becomes a smooth exquisite elf and gazes at me with a mysterious sweetness. Her full face is candid. Looking her straight in the eyes, I know she's brave, downright and honest, but her profile is impertinent and her mouth is sensual. Her nose tilts up; her full lips curve out, and somehow, for all she's so painfully thin, she's a warm, magnetic animal. Not a beautiful woman, but she carries enchantment. Something in her hums. There's a Debussy quality, the note of a flute played by a faun, interrupted by a harsher, more exciting beat, the beat of a drum. I could see her as a drummer boy, very small and rather ragged, marching to the battle of life with her head up, gaily whirling the drum-sticks and winking at the crowds that line the road, and I can see her as one of the nymphs in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*.

Behind this contradictory, bewildering creature with her suggestion of woodland thickets, eerie

music and harsh, passionate, gritty experience spreads the brown map of North China, sombre in the grip of winter. The huddled houses of the ancient walled city crowd behind her frail shoulders. The labyrinth of its secret swarming streets frames her smooth head. A stream of blue figures with slit-eyed parchment faces pours down the bazaars that are hung with scarlet banners. Maggie and I are whisked in my memory to the top of the city wall. We stand in the cold wind watching the crowd pour through the city gate, a blue flood pouring under the brown wall from an inexhaustible reservoir to be sucked up by the old thirsty land. The great leafless plain of North China, marked with graves as a face with small-pox, spreads behind us. Maggie and I are two specks perched on that pile of hoary stone. We spent a fortnight together dashing about Peking in rickshaws, bundled up in bearskins.

Although she was three years younger than I, she'd been married four years and had a baby, while I, much to my mother's annoyance, was still in the marriage market. Sometimes we'd go home to her house and play with the baby. There were usually half a dozen men about, all more or less in love with Maggie. They too were expected to play with the baby. I don't think she cared whether they liked this pastime or not. She didn't bother about them much. I think she had always done just what she liked with men. Her husband

was an exception. Travers hated her. He was a cold-blooded fish, a prig and an intellectual, and he hated her hilarity and her warmth and her carelessness. I've only her word for this, but I believe her. She never humbugged,

When our fortnight was up, my mother and I left for Hong Kong, via Nanking and Shanghai, and a month later Maggie turned up in Hong Kong and wheedled my mother into taking her to Manilla. But she couldn't get a cabin on our boat, so she followed a week later, and that's how it happened that I met Buck Dawson before she did. I had a week of him before she arrived. It was more than enough. Most girls in the Philippines fell in love in the course of the first afternoon. A good many went off, found a priest, and got married the same evening to men they'd never seen till that morning. This sort of thing was so prevalent that it went by the name of a disease. They called it Filipinitis, and everyone got it, the savagely shy, inexperienced girls like myself, and the weary old rips like the Admiral. I got it and he got it. I fell in love with Buck and the old fool of an Admiral with me. He was retired and had nothing better to do, but it was the place that did it. The stimulus was stronger than that of a good musical comedy because the décor was better, but the appeal and the effect on the nerves were the same, and the same old properties were in use. Moonlight, real moonlight, more

fantastically silvered than that ever shed from the roof down on any stage; battleships riding at anchor on the silvery water, real ones full of real males in spotless white; across the bay, a Spanish palace with open loggias where lovely girls in billowing muslins swooned and sang softly to tinkling mandolins, while immaculate silent-footed Chinese servants passed tinkling trays of iced intoxicating drinks; it was simply a better pornographic show than anything a mere actor manager could produce.

I remember the heat, the languor, the heavy, moist, aromatic air that was like a scented Turkish bath. The house was cool with its long open colonnades and stone floors. Our bedrooms had no doors. High screens shut us off from view of the corridors. I was awakened each morning by the sound of a bugle, and the military band playing the Star Spangled Banner. Then a Chinese boy appeared round my screen carrying my breakfast tray and put it down outside the white box of my mosquito net. I remember the delicious languor of my body under the thin sheet, the sheen on the pretty porcelain cups, the heady scents drifting through the green blinds, the dim greenish light in the room and the brilliance outside, and I remember how the day swam past, how we drifted along it from morning to evening in a burning dream whose fever increased when the sun went down. When the crimson and gold

faded ; when the moon rose, letting down its ladder of silver into the water, and the lights of the battleships were other ladders of gold reaching to the terrace steps underneath the verandah ; then, we attained madness. There was always the tinkle of cocktail glasses on the verandah, and the sound of laughter and snatches of song. There were balls every night in Manilla, or on board one of the battleships, and we would dance until day-break, when the Admiralty launch brought us back across the bay.

I can slip again into that still tropical dawn, can step again from the gangway of Buck's ship into the launch and travel across the shadowy water. The launch is full of slightly delirious and pleasantly sleepy young people. I cannot see their faces but the uniforms of the men gleam oyster white and the girls' frocks are softly coloured. Someone is strumming the inevitable banjo. Its twang is a queerly artificial sound in the stillness of sea and sky, but we are all humming the tune and we are all in love with love. The girls lie like crumpled flowers against the shoulders of their sweethearts, drifting languidly, deliciously along the dim current of the senses, while the stars fade in the pale sky and the warm moist silver-winged morning slips over the sea. And the wives and the maidens are all in like case. No one much cares whose white arms are gleaming or whose lips smiling. No one has a name or an identity,

for all are under an enchantment, all but my mother. She is merely happy and pleased with her daughter. Behind the lovely mask of her stiff, fragile face, she is watching me with indulgent confidence, and I seem to see her smile faintly with approval when she notices that I too am languorous, and that Lieutenant Dawson sitting close to me is looking down into my face with apparent absorption.

Poor mother! I was sitting near Buck on the verandah before dinner, the evening Maggie arrived, and I felt instantly the slight electric shock that went through him when she appeared at the end of the terrace in a wispy leaf-green dress.

“Who’s that?” he asked through his teeth.

“That’s Maggie,”

“Oh, so that’s Maggie?” He gave a short chuckle. There was excitement and delight in it; enough to squeeze his diaphragm for a second and betray him. Not to the others, only to me. Nor did he give himself away again, but I knew what had happened to him at the sight of her.

Falling in love at first sight is the name of this sort of thing, a curious phenomenon, a chemical process. Two organisms, powerfully attracted, each with their billions of atoms rush together, light an infinite series of tiny conflagrations in the blood and communicate to nerves, heart, brain, stomach, and other organs, sensations of exquisite felicity and acute distress. Irritation of the sharp-

est, diffused throughout the body, a frenzied craving for relief from the tension set up between bliss and agony, a physical tension so acute that it appears to the victim as an awful, immense psychic power, descended from Heaven with a promise of unearthly bliss. Well, I'd felt something like it myself for the same man, so I recognised its beginning. And after that I had the pleasure of watching it develop. Not a pleasant pastime for a jealous girl. Passion isn't a thing to watch. The obsessed are curious but not edifying objects of scrutiny. Sleep-walkers, dope-fiends, drunkards, gluttons or lovers, there is something distressing about them all. Maggie and Buck tried to keep their heads and behave like normal beings. But watching them was like watching two people sink into quicksand. I declare their faces were ghastly while they were doing it.

The fact is they didn't want to love, either of them, in that way. Most people are delighted when love comes to rouse them from lethargy. For most the drab world turns magical when that happens. But Maggie's world wasn't drab, nor Buck's either. There was nothing lethargic about either of them. Maggie lived on her toes, Buck was always on the alert, and the world afforded them both a vast amount of entertainment.

So they didn't like what happened to them. It interfered, it was a nuisance and a menace; it

scared Maggie and it made Buck angry. They were both spoiled darlings, accustomed to easy conquests. Buck was a rake already, and Maggie in another five years had she stuck to Travers would have been one. Fun was what she liked, hilarious adventure, laughter and adoration, and surprises, and for Buck women were a necessity, and he preferred many women, not only for variety but for safety. Short, sharp affairs that left him free to get on with his hitherto single, serious passion, the Navy. He didn't want this thing that was going to spoil his career, drive him into the divorce court, and last his lifetime.

And I think they feared each other, feared each one, that is, the other's power. The force of the attraction was the menace, and the danger was commensurate with the attraction. They both had sure instincts in matters of sex, and they must have recognised that each was an Ace in that line; and both wanted to dominate. Their union was, therefore, from the beginning, a contest and a struggle and a war. When a woman who is attractive to all men, and a man who is attractive to and attracted to hundreds of women, fall in love with each other, the result is bound to be something of a strain to both. They knew this. They must have known it. The amazing thing is that Maggie kept her end up so long. One had only to look at Buck's thick elastic figure that seemed to bound forward even when he was still,

at the sparks in his blue eyes, at the cruel curve of his clean-shaven mouth and the set of his heavy jowl, to know he was the stronger. His voice alone was enough. It was a tyrant's voice. It was barely audible. He spoke quickly, softly, but very distinctly, and he clipped his words short and used few of them and never repeated.

What I'm convinced of is that their affair was in no sense a result of the ridiculous glamour of that wild American frivolity in the tropics. It was as different from the artificial sentiments and promiscuous appetites swarming round them, as black hatred. It made Maggie hard and blind to her surroundings. It turned her into a stone to me and to all of us. I remember driving with her round the Lunetta a day or two after she met Buck. She hadn't mentioned him, she'd scarcely said two words to me, and there she sat frowning, rigid, white and abstracted, while the orchestra poured its voluptuous music on the air. The place oozed and seethed with romance. Carriages filled with flower-like girls were driving round and the Navy looking much handsomer in spotless white than was legitimate, was there playing the game of love. Maggie didn't notice. She sat beside me deaf, dumb and blind, her face rigid, her eyes enormous with a shameless expectancy. She was waiting for Buck, and the proximity of her nerve-wracked body was painful.

"Maggie" I said, "for the love of God, pull

yourself together." She didn't answer, didn't hear me. But when Buck's stocky figure emerged from the crowd of promenaders I felt a convulsive shudder go through her. It was instantly checked, but not before it was communicated to my nerves, and so I too watched him, with a double excitement, approach our carriage. He looked to me for a moment, I remember, like a stealthy soft-footed beast, but he was very formal when he reached us, and stopped hat in hand. And there we are again, the three of us, in the sweltering heat, with the sun setting behind us across the bay, waves of nauseating music beating in the damp air and waves of sick excitement beating, beating in our throats. Speechless they were. Not a word to say to each other.

"Idiots!" I shouted suddenly. "Why don't you do what you want to do! If you won't go off, I will. There's the Admiral, I'm going."

The old Admiral was waving. I jumped down and ran to him through the crowd and dragged him away out of sight of those two.

I believe they would have fallen in love with each other instantly, anywhere, under any conditions, and I take it as a proof of Buck's sagacity as a man of the world that no one save myself realised till the British Squadron sailed out of Manilla Bay and Maggie went after it, what had happened, or suspected that one of those incomprehensible passions, powerful to change and

mould a couple of human lives, had begun amid the light laughter and loves of that American colony. It was Buck, not Maggie, who saved appearances and preserved the decencies. Maggie took her cue, I am sure, from him. Her hypocrisy wasn't natural to her. It would have been natural to her to let all the world see she adored him. But Buck would have none of this. He was always a stickler for form, always kept her in order, and he began, I'm sure, to do so at once, with the result that they did, on the whole, behave with remarkable restraint. For although the moonlit terrace and the gardens and the sea invited her every night to escape with him, she remained continually one of us, and after the first three days, became suddenly, as if she'd received orders that must be obeyed, the gayest member of the party. Probably matters had already come to a head. Possibly they'd already decided what they were going to do. In any case, she suddenly shook herself into animation and became the object of general adoration. The men flocked round her, thick as pigeons after crumbs, and she fed them all in her sweet laughing way, while Buck waited in the background like a crouching tiger. He could afford to wait and he knew how.

They had their hours alone together, unknown to anyone. Hours of blazing noon when everyone else in the house was asleep, but shaded recesses in the loggias were cool enough for lovers con-

sumed with fiery longing, hours when the night was fading and the dawn breaking, and the garden was deserted. Buck's ship lay less than half a mile off shore opposite the stone-flagged terrace. It was easy for him to step into a boat and be rowed across to her.

Most certainly Buck knew how to handle such situations. Obviously, he had had a great deal of practice. He had always had to do with women, and he had approached them smoothly, quietly, as a lion approaches its mate in the breeding season. It was always the breeding season for Buck, but until he met Maggie his affairs had left no mark on him. He had simply gone through the world choosing this one and that for his purpose, and he knew by instinct whom to choose, so there had been no scandal or fuss, though I've a memory of a large, rather sloppy woman with a round face and wisps of straw-coloured hair, trailing through the corridors at Cavite in search of him. If she and Buck had a scene no one heard of it. She vanished up the coast where she had a husband in charge of a lonely military camp of some sort. Buck knew very well how to deal with women, and he didn't lose his head or forget what he knew when at last he himself fell a victim.

Buck was always a brute and sometimes a gentleman, a subtle brute, and often the brute was in charge, but usually he lived up to the accepted standards of his class, the class that has

governed England for centuries; runs the Army and the Navy; supports cricket, fox hounds horse racing and the Church. We became friends of a sort in the end, because we were obliged to, at any rate I was. If I were to share Maggie's life I had to be friends with Buck. And in England, when he had given up the sea, it was less difficult than one might expect. I would spend hours with him going round his stables, paddocks and farms. We had long arguments as to the merits of short-horns and Gloucester spots. The whole of the land of England was ours for a meeting ground, and he was pleased in the hunting field to approve of my seat and my hands.

"By Jove, Caroline, you went like a bird to-day. I saw you taking the brook at Bailey's Bottom. I tell you, Maggie, Carol's one of the best women to hounds in England."

He never got over being surprised at the fact that Maggie and I, a couple of mere Americans, could take our fences with the best blood stock of English womanhood. If England had demanded of us nothing more difficult than a ride across country—

What it was to demand of me I shall put down on another sheet of paper. What it demanded of Maggie fits in very well here, for what England expected of her was what Buck expected. He was all of England to her, and would pass with most people as a very good representative of the best of

it. When one looked at him one felt that one knew why the British Empire covered half the globe.

He expected of Maggie more, I believe, than any sane man of another race would demand of any woman. He expected abundant passion and a permanent capacity for unemotional friendship. She was to ravish his senses and be to the rest of the world as hard as flint. She was to have character and a will of her own, but to like what he liked, and do what he did, and be always there when he wanted her. She must have a level head, a way with horses and dogs, servants and tenants, considerable administrative ability, great powers of physical endurance and a streak of madness. She must be humdrum and exciting at the right time. She must never be ill and if she were ill she must not make a fuss. He expected her to be loyal and not to need watching. In other words he would trust her with an almost complete liberty, give her any number of opportunities to let him down if she had a mind to, but counted on her never to take them, while she gave him a like freedom, understanding that he was not in his turn expected to be what is called virtuous. She was to accept him as he was and never whine or whimper if he displeased her. She was to be on the whole rather silent. A life spent in talking was his idea of hell. I might go on. The list is by no means complete. It was rather a tall order for a much-spoiled American woman.

CHAPTER V

THE light of the steaming tropical afternoon filtering through the green shutters makes the room seem like a cave. There is a watery sheen on the polished stone floor, and from the harbour come water sounds, the chug-chug of motor launches, the splash of oars, and the hollow voices of men calling across the bay. An insect is buzzing loudly in the room. It is beating its hard body with little slaps against the high ceiling. A heavy flowering creeper wafts its strong scent through the window; a band of sunlight leans like a ladder across the greenish air from the centre of the floor to a crack in the blind; all along it, minute particles are dancing.

The girl lying on the bed I have never seen, and I cannot see her now. She is myself, invisible, shapeless and substanceless. She leaves no imprint on the counterpane inside the white box of the mosquito net. The bed is like a square ship afloat on the floor. The buzzing of the insect is loud as the buzzing roar of a dynamo. Outside in the blazing heat the world hangs its languid head as if under a burning enchantment. I think the pain of angry mortification must have disturbed the girl's siesta, the long siesta, I mean,

of her youth. She acts in my memory as someone who is struggling to awake from a bad dream. She is thrashing about, making queer groping gestures. She frowns, stares in a disgusted way, then bursts out laughing. I think she laughs when she's hurt instead of crying. This is to become a habit with her. In any case she is more awake than usual, and I can remember it strangely, as if it were yesterday, and yet as if it had happened to someone else.

She had been a fool about Buck Dawson. She had known it the moment he set eyes on Maggie. But even before Maggie came he had given her not the slightest ground for thinking he cared for her. Why then had she been such an idiot? And why did she mind so much his dropping her for Maggie? Was she really in love with him herself, and what did that mean? She didn't know what it meant. Her romantic ideas about it didn't fit this experience with its subtle sickening excitement, its sensations of hunger and thirst. This thing had affected her lips, her throat, her fingertips. It had crept into her body, interfered with her breathing and her digestion, poured into her blood a delicious and dreadful fever. She was certain now that she was not in love with the thickset powerful brute. The idea of his touching her was loathsome, but two nights ago, driving home with him from a ball in a rattling victoria behind a sleepy Filipino coachman, she had

longed to fling herself into his arms. Her breast had ached. There had been a throbbing pulse beating in her throat, a sense of suffocation. It was not only wounded vanity that she was suffering from, it was the humiliation of knowing that something in herself had betrayed her, something she'd never experienced before. It had seized her suddenly and dragged her towards a man whom she did not know, a strange sailor off a battleship whom she never wanted to speak to again.

The real thing in her was a savage desire to remain intact. The real Caroline Merryweather loathed being touched, had always loathed it. Was that true? If it was, what had become of that precious, proud, independent, untouchable self of hers? It didn't exist. She was like all the others who held up their mouths, whose bones turned to pulp in this place. Animals? No, they were more like plants, soft, languid, full of sap and juice, exhaling a deadly sort of scent, the scent of sex. Some were already rotting as they drooped and swayed in the stupefying languor. Only plants were alive in those islands. To become a tropical plant of some sort, live in a sensuous stupor till one rotted. No, never, she'd be damned if she did.

This life, these silly white men sending jets of nasal laughter across the drowsy air, strumming banjos under the stars and talking about the

coming war with the Japs while they made love to other men's wives, it was like being drunk. All this was a sort of drunkenness. Now she was sober again. But it wasn't much fun. She was smarting. She wished she was attractive to men, She wished she was like Maggie. Probably no one would ever want to marry her for herself. But the idea of marriage filled her with loathing. Oh God, how complicated it all was. She was afraid of marrying and afraid of not marrying, of being lonely and queer, different.

Her terror of sex was the sort of thing that drove some women into convents, but to be shut up in a convent would be death to her. Did she believe in God? The God of the open wilderness, perhaps, Him whom the Indians call "The Great Mystery." A wave of intolerable longing to go home swept over her. I remember that feeling. I've had it since, many times.

"Can't we go home, mother?"

"Home?"

"Yes, home to California."

My mother's face looked grey in the dim room. Her blue eyes were frightened. I see them fluttering like frightened moths. She had come in to find out what had happened to upset her dreams about Buck Dawson.

"What has happened between you and Lieutenant Dawson, Caroline?"

"Nothing, mother."

"Nothing? You've dropped him as if he were a hot potato."

I must have laughed again. If I could hear the sound of that laughter, it seems to me now, the whole thing would come alive and happen all over again, but it is only ghostly laughter, and it makes no sound.

"Don't, Caroline, don't. Do stop laughing. Everyone's asleep. Don't. Oh, do stop, my darling. What is it? What is it?" She is on her knees now by the bed, is parting the mosquito net curtains; her white muslin dressing gown froths on the floor. She smells of eau-de-Cologne as usual, but she is unlike herself, she is passionately, overpoweringly maternal, and I don't want her so close. I don't want her near me. I don't want to be touched, even by my mother. A wish to hurt seizes me.

"Why won't you go home, mother? Why? Tell me."

"I can't, darling, I've been away too long. I hate it now." She falters, her eyelids quiver. "Your father haunts the place. I can't face him."

Her mouth twists. She buries her face against the girl's side. Over their heads the little armoured insect beats with its futile body against the ceiling, and in the ladder of light that slants up across the dim air, a million tiny things are dancing.

A voice begins singing outside, the languid

chant of a native going along the road through the desolate sun towards the more desolate jungle, and afar off, across the vast Pacific, the figure of a man appears to the girl, a big man with a shock of straight black hair and flashing white teeth, sitting at a desk in San Francisco in an ill-fitting suit, rough like the hide of a buffalo. He gets up with a fling of his long limbs, calls orders to stenographers and clerks, makes rapidly for the street and jumps into a four-wheeled trap that is waiting with a pair of fast horses. He always drove home in the afternoon behind that pair of chestnuts, and now she watches him. The sun is setting across the sea as he climbs the wooded hill to the north of San Francisco. He will urge his horses to a gallop up the drive to his house, leap from his seat at the bottom of the steps before the front door, and give a whistle that is a signal to his daughter. But the house is closed; the windows are shuttered; the door is bolted. There is no one about but the gardeners, and they do not see him. He is a ghost. The only real thing in the picture is the closed house that holds her childhood under lock and key. It is there, itself a small abandoned ghost, wandering through the rooms that are covered with dust sheets. Couldn't they meet, the ghost man, and the ghost child? Couldn't he get to her and take her in his arms again where she would be safe? He would protect her. He always did and he always would.

"Why did you leave him so much, mother, if you loved him?"

"I don't know, Caroline, I don't know."

Why do we do the things we don't want to do? Why don't we know we'll be sorry afterwards? Why don't we even know what we want? Have we no power over ourselves, not even the power to please ourselves? Is egoism itself an illusion? What do you say, Tawaska? I know what you'd say. You'd say my mother was a frog who hopped about Europe and the Far East because her skin was tickled in a certain way. You'd say I was a toad with twitching legs and body, convulsed with a desire for Buck Dawson on the same principle. All our passions and dreams are nothing but automatic reflexes according to you. Not all, Tawaska. Surely there are some? Surely I could prove to you——?

Why, for instance, didn't I have a ghastly row with Maggie during that queer morbid fortnight? I was jealous both ways. I was lonely. Leading my mother's life I'd made no friends. Men didn't like me. Her women friends didn't either. I'd not been a success anywhere, in any of those drawing-rooms in New York, Rome or Paris. The girls I met at parties filled me with scorn, and I've no doubt they despised me equally. I'd lost track of my school chums. When the conventional men my mother produced said they loved me, I knew they were lying. Only effeminate men liked me. I

liked horses and dogs much better. But you can't globe trot with horses and dogs, so I had no companions. Maggie was the first woman I'd met who had seemed really fond of me. She had been perfectly sweet to me. It's no wonder I responded with an exaggerated devotion.

I cannot recall the vanished sensations of those days. I can't get back into the body of that girl and relive her experience. I can only deduce what I must have felt from what I remember doing and from conventional knowledge of how people do suffer when they are jealous. That's another automatic reflex. I suppose that I suffered from the usual intensely disagreeable mixture of wounded vanity and baulked desire, but I think I took it all extra hard, and I think rage describes my state of mind best; for I see that girl with glaring eyes, blinded by rage, thrashing about inside her white cage like a wild cat. She had a lot of passion locked up in her rigid virginal body, and I think the pain of those doubled stabs was extra violent. Her vanity had been colossal, her mortification was correspondingly excessive. Everything about her was excessive, I fancy, and so far everything had been secret; everything that mattered to her, even her reading. She had, I remember, a quaint collection of books, hidden in her trunk. She read them in solitude. Shelley's poems, the *Imitation of Christ*, William Law's *Call to a Holy Life*, a copy of the New Testament and Milton's

Paradise Lost were among them. Strange reading they must have made in that riotous naval station. But I think I abandoned Milton and Thomas à Kempis just about then, together with various other things, such as saying my prayers. I don't remember coming to any definite decision in the matter, but I don't think I ever went down on my knees after that winter. Praying had simply lost its reality, and God, the nebulous Being I had clung to in secret, lost His. The World obliterated him; the World and Life. For Life changed when I met Maggie; it became dramatic, and very absorbing.

It is difficult to describe my first feeling for her. A sort of schwärmerei, I suppose. What American schoolgirls call having a crush on someone. But I wasn't a schoolgirl, and the whole point of the thing is that it lasted. We grew old together, and we stuck together, and I am now a lonely old woman, the one who is left to look back upon a long loyal human relationship. It wasn't perfect but it was robust and full of sweetness, and so it is very important to me, to be truthful about Maggie. I remember writing her a letter after I had left Peking, telling her that if she did not come to England I would somehow, no matter what obstacles were in the way, get back to China the following winter, and when she turned up in Hong Kong I was as delighted as any girl could be by the arrival of her sweetheart. But I didn't

betray the delight or make any gesture in answer to the attraction. Maggie and I were never demonstrative. We never gushed or handled each other. And yet I knew then, I think, that I cared for her more than I could ever care for any man.

How complicated it all is. How impossible to analyse a human heart, least of all one's own. Maggie had been wild and winsome and gay those days in Peking, an untidy, careless, enchanting creature, as enchanting as some children are, and she had something of the same charm for me. I wanted to be near her, to protect her, to endow her with all my worldly goods, and the fact that she wanted nothing of the sort made no difference.

That Buck should have dropped me for her was a blow I got over quickly; that she should care so much for him as almost to forget my existence was a cruelty that went much deeper. I know this is true, because it is Maggie's behaviour to me during those days that I recall with special distinctness, not Buck's.

She was inaccessible. I can see now that she was less selfish and idiotic than most women would have been in her position but I did not realise it then. She maintained the same tacit assumption of intimacy, and came into my room in the mornings to smoke a cigarette before dressing, but she didn't talk to me, or confide in me, and when we were alone together would go off into long fits of abstraction. She wasn't the kind

to overflow when her heart was full. She never wasted delight that way or sought that kind of relief when she was unhappy. And so she kept her wild sweet emotions to herself and made up her mind without reference to anyone what she was going to do. It wasn't until the last day of her stay, when everything was decided between them, that she told me her plans. Until then she either didn't talk at all, or rousing herself, chattered about nothing. I can see her now in her tussore pyjamas lying limp in my wicker chaise longue, watching the smoke from her cigarette float up to the ceiling, and I can remember prodding her with questions.

"Do you think he dances well?"

"Who?"

"Dawson."

"So-so. No Englishman does, really."

"He'd be good-looking, if he wasn't so stocky and heavy round the jaw."

No answer.

"Do you think he's handsome?"

"No, not particularly. His hands are nice."

"I should say he's got the devil of a temper."

"Why?" She shows a flicker of interest.

"That glint in his eye. I expect he's an awful brute, really, for all his smooth manners."

"I see you don't like him."

"Oh, I like him well enough. I simply hate men, that's all."

"You'll get over that, when the right one comes along."

"I shall never marry. Men don't like me, and I loathe the idea of belonging to any man."

"That's nonsense." This with a yawn. "We all say that."

"I mean it."

"Don't be silly, I must have my bath now." She hobbles to the doorway, stretches, yawns again, her arms above her head. Her slippers slap the stone floor. "Gee, I'm sleepy." She disappears round the screen, and I hear her go down the corridor whistling.

There was a telescope on the terrace, and one morning she said: "It's ten o'clock. Come out, Caroline, and say good morning to Buck Dawson through the spy glass." It was true that we could pick out his sturdy figure on the bridge. There he was waving. Maggie, with her eye clapped to the glass, waved back, fluttering her handkerchief.

"But how did he know it was us?"

"He expected me," she said briefly. "We arranged it for ten o'clock. Funny things, spy-glasses; now he's just a speck."

So we exchanged no confidences, and she never knew that I had had any feeling for him myself. Indeed she never in all the years that followed ever knew what I felt about him. She no more suspected my later intense dislike than my first silly fondness.

But to conceal a deep hurt that is prodded daily with new sharp persistent stabs is an exasperating effort. Everything Maggie did exasperated me. If she hung about with Buck in tow as if tied to her by an invisible rope, that exasperated me. If she disappeared, I was in a frenzy to know where she was. For a day I pretended a sick headache and stayed in my room. For two days I gave myself up very stupidly and rashly to making a fool of my old admirer. But it must have been a very exhausting business, keeping up appearances, for I nearly spoiled it all by one of those sudden, uncontrolled actions prompted by passion that are incomprehensible when the passion is forgotten. I had been sleeping very badly and got up one morning before sunrise and went out on to the loggia. It was stiflingly hot. I knew that jugs of lemonade had been left on a table outside and went in search of a drink, and I saw Maggie and Buck standing on the terrace below me. She was nestling in his arms with her cheek against his coat. He was staring over her head, across the water, towards that ship of his. Its lights still glowed through the morning twilight. There was something strong, determined and gentle in Buck's attitude that I had never seen before. Perhaps he was realising then how important Maggie was to him, and how he would have to give up the sea for her. In any case they stood perfectly still for some minutes, while I

looked at them, and the soft dawn seemed to surround them with a mysterious beatitude. I remember a cool breeze stirred as I watched and wafted delicious scents from the dripping plants. I remember birds were beginning to flutter and twitter. It was almost like a morning at home. Suddenly something snapped in me. There was a bottle of lime juice on the loggia table, one of those big bottles. I reached for it, picked it up by the neck and hurled it at the two unconscious figures. I didn't wait to see what happened. I heard it crash on the stones, but I was already flying for my room, where I flung myself on my bed and indulged in some sort of hysterical fit that I smothered in the bedclothes. If Maggie had discovered me then, I would have blurted out the whole truth. But she didn't come near me and she never mentioned the sudden arrival of the bottle on the stones of the terrace. I suppose she thought one of the China boys or a sailor servant was throwing the thing away, had aimed at the water, and made a bad shot. Not choosing to tell me that she was out in the garden with Buck, she naturally did not mention the incident. It was lucky for me that she didn't.

Two days later she told me her plans. We'd been to a party, as usual, and instead of trailing off to bed she came to my room.

"I'm going the day after to-morrow, Lina.

There's a boat leaving for Hong Kong and I must go on it."

"But why? What's happened? Has your husband—"

"No, oh no. I'm not going back to Bill."

"Why then—we're staying ten days longer—I thought—"

"Don't take it so hard, Lina. You look as if—Lord, child, cheer up. We'll meet in England."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I'm following Buck Dawson, that's what I mean. The British Squadron's sailing to-morrow. They're going home. They're calling at Hong Kong and Singapore and various other places, and I'm calling there too." She gave a queer wild little laugh.

"So you are in love with him."

She nodded.

"I knew it."

"Everyone knows it, I suppose. They will soon, anyhow."

"What will your husband do?"

"I dunno. Divorce me quick, I hope."

"You're going to marry Buck Dawson?"

"Of course."

"You're mad."

"I never was half so sane."

"You only met him a week ago."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"You don't know him."

"That's where you're wrong. I know him as if I'd made him."

"That wild little thing," was the way they talked of her when she'd gone, the kinder ones, or "that madcap" or "that crazy girl," but she wasn't the least crazy. She knew exactly what she was doing the six months she spent whirling like a small tornado along the Equator and up the Mediterranean in the wake of Buck's battle cruiser, getting Buck and herself into trouble with the naval authorities in Hong Kong, Singapore, and at last Portsmouth, being a nuisance and a scandal and a diversion to Admiralty officials at Gib and in Whitehall, and a maddening thorn in the stubborn side of the Dawson clan; being a great trial, indeed, to Buck himself, until at last he resigned his commission, ploughed his way through the mud of the divorce court and married her. If a complete disregard for conventions, a flaming fiery belief in Buck's love for her, and an irrepressible gaiety in the face of accumulating difficulties, constitute wildness, then she was a madcap, but I think she was perfectly reasonable. She had almost no money, and no one in England to fall back on. I believe during those months that she sometimes went hungry. I know she did a passage from Naples steerage and another somewhere, second class. But nothing of that sort mattered to her. She knew what she wanted and she didn't care about anything else, if only she

got it. What she wanted was to be with Buck and stick to Buck, and she defied even Buck's wishes in the matter. Buck didn't like being made ridiculous. She didn't mind.

When Travers found she was gone, he packed off the baby, and the baby, placidly but with what seemed a complete and inflexible determination almost equal to her own, followed her. It missed her in Hong Kong, for she had set sail again by the time Travers had made up his mind to send her son after her, but it turned up six months later in London, in the arms of a Chinese nurse, having travelled halfway round the world quite comfortably in search of its mother, accepting the hospitality of various embassies and port authorities on the way with the complacency of a royal visitor, while worried men in white duck telegraphed wildly from Hong Kong to Manilla, from Saigon to Singapore, and from Port Said to Naples, Gib, Paris and Dover, to get news of its mother.

I remember Buck's surprise when Maggie sent for the baby and the Chinese woman to come down to Portsmouth. My mother and I had received the couple in Grosvenor Square, and it was I who took them down. Maggie was living in lodgings in Portsmouth because she and Buck didn't wish to be separated even for a day, and didn't see why they should be. They were wait-

ing to see what Bill Travers was going to do. All that he had done so far was to send on the baby. Whether this meant that divorce proceedings were about to be started, Maggie didn't know, but she was glad to see the baby. She hadn't in spite of appearances, been running away from the baby. She had simply been following Buck, and had not realised the baby was following her. As she had left no address anywhere, not having one to leave, she had no news of the infant. She said, when I handed her son over to her, that she was sure Portsmouth was a very healthy place for babies.

Buck said, "You'll be asking me to wheel the pram on Sundays."

Maggie said, "No, I'll wheel it."

Buck asked me through clenched teeth what he was to do with a woman like that, then burst out laughing. The Chinawoman stood by, her hands in the sleeves of her black satin pyjamas, smiling.

The existence of William Travers, junior, would have made no difference to Buck had he known of it. Nothing would have made any difference to Buck once he'd caught fire from Maggie. I believe he'd have married her if she'd had a dozen children all clinging to her skirts in Manilla Bay, and when she had borne him in his turn four sons, I don't think he thought of her very often as the mother of his children. One didn't think of her that way. She was one of those

women who are perfectly made for nature's purposes but don't look it. Producing babies seemed to have no permanent effect on her appearance, her temperament, her health or her attitude to life. It wasn't that she didn't like them; she did. She liked them as babies because they were nice to play with, just as puppies are, and she liked them as boys because they were boys, and as they grew older she was friends with them all, very close friends, but she wasn't maternal or possessive or passionate about them. She was only passionate about Buck, and not sentimental about anyone.

And as she began, so she went on. She had been right in saying she knew Buck as if she had made him. She was right in defying the conventions he respected. In any case she never learned caution. It took her years to become even moderately clever about managing him. That wasn't her way. Nor did it occur to her that she could ever lose him. She never did. She was his only love, if one can use such a phrase in connection with Buck, and in a sense she always had him, even when he set about breaking her heart. What had begun on the musical comedy stage of the Philippines was something that lasted her lifetime. It changed her. With her emotions at last deeply engaged, she concentrated her careless wits and prepared, grimly, for a long struggle.

She knew the dice were loaded against her. She

had no backing in England, no position, no great claim to beauty and no health to speak of. She was perfectly aware that to give her heart and her life to a man like Buck Dawson was dangerous. The danger stimulated her. It made her use her brains. Indeed Buck and his demands on her, his obscure moods, open villainies and hidden kinks were to provide her with a problem that never bored her. For as long as she lived she had him to absorb her, and he kept her in one way and another fully occupied during twenty years, providing her with enough joy, anguish, irritation and excitement for one life, for a life anyhow of the concentrated personal quality peculiar to women intensely feminine.

Her nature helped. Places meant nothing to Maggie. She never had the slightest wish to go back to Baltimore or Washington where she had been so gay, so spoilt, so loved. She behaved from now on as if the Continent of America had disappeared under the sea like Atlantis and at about the same epoch. She lived in the present and lacked a taste for geography. Wherever she was, she was surrounded by people who were real to her, and she noticed nothing much else, and she treated her surroundings with a careless indifference, adapting herself quickly, lightly, contemptuously to the environment of the man she cared for. I remember Buck saying delightedly: "Maggie's taken to huntin' like a duck to

water. You'd think she'd been born in this country." Buck didn't understand that had he carried her off to a sheep farm in Australia, or to an Esquimo hut in the Arctic, she would have adapted herself with equal ease to the situation, for so long as he satisfied her.

And her stormy life with Buck did satisfy her until Sonia came along. She wouldn't have changed it for any other sort of existence. I think that she even enjoyed in a grim sort of way having to fight the other women. In any case it was an above-board, healthy, violent, out of doors life. There was nothing for years that she had to conceal. One couldn't conceal Buck's actions. His infidelities were blatant. Indeed the one thing about him which was not always quite obvious to his friends was his jealous, lasting attachment to Maggie herself. The other women were so much more gorgeous than Maggie that only his close intimates knew this and understood that he expected Maggie herself never to doubt or forget it.

But I am racing ahead, and I must, I suppose, stick to some sort of chronology, if this narrative is to be comprehensible.

CHAPTER VI

THE memory of the week my mother and I spent in Cavite after Maggie had gone, brings back a faint sensation of sickness. Atmosphere of a sick girl's dreams. The shape of the house, the colour of the sunlight, the faces of the people all changed. The whole took on a slightly monstrous appearance. The brilliant blossoms drooping along the loggia looked bloated, heavy, as if they might burst like over-ripe fruit. The smooth sea appeared slimy, the steaming air smelt of decayed vegetation, and the voices of women discussing Maggie sounded from far away like the screams of parrots in a distant jungle. I went on dancing and talking, was carried back and forth across the blinding water at midday and the star-lit water at night and the pale ghostly water at dawn. My relief was in fighting Maggie's battles. The things they said of her roused me. I engaged I remember in a very exhausting combat with my mother over Maggie; I don't know what I said to her, but I won. She accepted Maggie as I presented her, the ill-used wife, saved from a brute of a husband by a chivalrous English gentleman who adored her with complete propriety.

The final episode of my visit closes this chapter

of my youth with an ironic comment that will, I fancy, be found to repeat itself as these fragments are pieced together.

I had dreamed for a moment of inspiring love in Buck Dawson, and I did actually inspire a flare of senile passion in the Admiral. I use the word passion, because his emotions were strong enough to make him giggle like a lunatic and shake till his teeth rattled in his old head. His condition began to be evident on a dreadful two days' picnic into the interior of the island. How well I remember the grunting hogs on the river bank, rooting in the slimy mud with their great snuffling snouts. The near sibilant splutter of the silly old man's whisper sounds through this grunting. All the women are in hammocks slung along the deck of the small steamboat. The men are to sleep on shore with the pigs and the natives and the swarming mosquitos. Their camp beds stand on the dark bank with mosquito nets festooned over them. The river in the moonlight is uncanny. It flows silently between the monstrous towering trees. All day we have chugged up the river, lolling together on the deck, drinking and eating and singing lullabies while the forests slipped by. Our hostess had wanted to show us the interior of the island, but no one looked at the monotonous river banks with the occasional Filipino villages strewn like untidy chicken runs under the trees. No one had looked at any-

thing. No one had been conscious of anything but the heat and the nearness of the others, and gradually these two forces had melted them as if they were wax figures, till they had toppled over against each other's shoulders and had lain there in a blur of sensation.

I cannot remember the names of any of them. I've no idea who they were or what has become of them. I cannot even remember with any distinctness the Admiral himself. I can only recall the unpleasant sensation of his hot old body very close to me and his hot breath on my neck. I thought nothing much of it. I was stupefied too, and my sensations at the spectacle of that melting dislocated group being carried along a strange river, through a strange jungle to an unknown destination that turned out to be a large pigsty, were not sharp. I saw it all through a haze, and so I see it now. The only definite figure in the group is my stiff mother, bravely keeping up an animated conversation with her hostess as if her shrill mechanical voice could be made in some way to lend propriety to our abandoned attitudes. A languid intermingled group of featureless beings, an old man detaches himself from it. He came along the deck in the dark that night among our hammocks. He was confused and ashamed. He sniggered but he tried to carry off as a joke the unseemliness of his behaviour. My mother

slump
discreet

stopped him. She sat up in her swinging couch beside me, her head swathed in a veil, and said sharply:

“What is it, Admiral? Have you lost something?”

And the poor man with a babble of confused explanations slunk away through the dark to join the hogs on the bank.

The memory of the return journey next day is a horrid blur. I think we were some of us sea-sick crossing a large inland lake. I know that my mother was silent and I’ve an impression that my tiresome old Admiral induced me to go to sleep with my head on his shoulder, but nothing is distinct about the silly untidy business.

It was several mornings later, the day before we were to leave Manilla, that he crept into my bedroom, giggling and shaking, and grimacing in an incomprehensible manner. The China boy had just brought in my breakfast; the last notes of the Star Spangled Banner had died away on the morning air, and I was drowsing under my single sheet inside my transparent bed, when I saw to my astonishment a white head poked round the edge of my screen. He was grinning and before I knew what had happened there he was on his knees by my bed clawing at the mosquito net like an old monkey at a cage and laughing convulsively. The rest is confused. It didn’t last long. I’ve a feeling he mumbled idiotic words

such as "you darling. You little darling, don't be frightened." I remember shouting at him to get out. I've a curious picture of his going round the bed on all fours like an ape looking for the door into the cage, but he wasn't there long. My threat to call for help penetrated his demented senses and he withdrew.

I feel sorry now for the poor old thing. He wrote me a pathetic letter of apology. "You cannot understand," he wrote, "what it is to be an old man, hopelessly in love." I remember those words, they bring mocking echoes in their train, but I can't remember his face. Looking back from this distance, it all seems unreal. Nothing happened there that lasted except Maggie's affair. Manilla and Cavite are places in a dream, and when I think now of the Far East where Maggie and I met, it is Tawaska I see, the solitary giant walking across Asia. He had called at the Legation in Peking a few days before we got there. It was Bill Travers I think who saw him. It must have been Travers who told us. Yes; I remember now. The harsh grating voice at the Christian's dinner-table comes back to me; the words come back to me.

"Funny thing. There was a chap here two days ago, a Finn, Tawaska by name—Dr. Tawaska, a traveller in cigarettes he said he was. He'd dropped in to warn us. He said he was walking across Asia, that he'd been walking about

China for some time and had picked up bits of information. He said things were going to happen in China that wouldn't be pleasant for white men. He didn't care himself what became of us, but he didn't think the missionaries should be allowed to stay on in districts far from the railway. It wasn't safe, he said, for the women and children. But when I asked him for definite details, he couldn't or wouldn't give me any. Just waved his paws and said in a soft little voice, 'Everywhere there is much whispering and jabbering, all over the land, in all the provinces. It's as if the graves were muttering. I think there will be an uprising. I think there will be much evil let loose. It will be as if evil spirits sprang from the million graves of this old country, and seized upon the people'. Any of you fellows see the chap? Know anything about him? Mad probably—I hope so, anyhow."

It wasn't till three years later that I heard of Tawaska again, but now when I think of Maggie and myself perched on top of the wall of Peking, I see him threading his way through the crowded bazaar, smoothly, rapidly, with that great rolling stride of his, passing unknown to us through the city gate and going out, unseen across the leafless plains of North China.

We missed him by a hair. I've questioned him carefully about dates, and I am almost certain that he was still in Peking when my mother and

I got there, and that he came to our hotel one evening when we were upstairs in our rooms. There's no sense in his having met Bill Travers. It doesn't make sense, nothing about him and myself makes sense. I was probably polishing my nails. My mother was lying, I suppose, on her bed with a novel. Probably she was talking to me about getting married. She was obsessed by that necessity. She would go on and on about it.✓

I had discovered, much to my surprise, that she didn't like me to mention the fact of the Indian strain in my blood, and I think that an unconscious fear of some reversion to type on my part, added to the strength of her obsession. It is difficult otherwise to explain her intense desire to see me married to what she called an English gentleman. England appeared to her, I fancy, farther removed than any other place from the wilds that were my natural home. She was right. Well I married an Englishman in the end, but it wasn't a success and yet I am not aware of having reverted to type, unless you call taking up with Marcella Mackintosh and her gang a case of it. She created a wilderness all right, but it wasn't a real one. I wish I dared claim as my own a background of such splendour as the true one. I don't, I'm spoiled for it. Forests, mountains or desert, I can't abide them now. They frighten me. If I went back to the ranch, what would I

do there? Draw the curtains, turn on the wireless, play patience in the evenings. I might ride all day for the sake of getting tired, so that I could sleep, but I'd never go far alone into the mountains. Sleep, that's what I want. Oblivion, that's all I want, so that I can forget.

But I must remember first. That's why I'm here in this small still room with the wind awake outside, the big, young American wind that I liked as a child, but am afraid of now.

What do you say, ageless shadow man in stone, man of half-light, of long twilight, dug up out of Mexico; what have you to say to me? Nothing. But suppose I were writing this for you, what would you make of it? He'd make nothing of it. But if I write down under your fierce intolerant gaze that takes no notice of me, but stares past me from distance to distance, if I write down only those things I could swear to about my life and Maggie's, won't they make a pattern of some sort, produce a couple of characters of a sort? No. But if we had no identity, and no will, if we were merely carried on by life like a couple of bobbing corks in a torrent, where did the struggle come in, the sense of frustration, of being baulked, beaten, at grips with an invisible antagonist?

You didn't struggle much—and you were asleep.

I imagine Tawaska's soft, small voice issuing

from those stone lips and sometimes I have a wild impulse to pray to the thing, to fall on my knees in front of it. I don't do anything so ridiculous. I know it's nothing but a rude weapon carved roughly into a man's head. Its grandeur and its beauty are accidental. It is not a great work of art. It is something more than that. An Indian warrior of Montezuma's time hacked it out to be used in battle, and without his suspecting anything, a very ancient power that lurked in the mountains south of Panama took hold of it and sealed it with a sign that I obscurely, deeply, instinctively, recognise.

I would like to laugh at all this. I can't. It is too still here, and too queer, and the wind outside is too insistent. It calls from a world outside life. It is telling a story, probably the only true story that will ever be told, of what took place on the earth. I am frightened, Tawaska. It is frightening to be quite alone in a silly strange little room with flimsy walls and only a stone priest out of old Mexico for company.

* * * *

I wish I had never come here, I wish that I had stayed in Paris. I still had lots of friends in Paris. The women I'd been fond of in England were gone mostly. I'd lost them in one way and another. A good many had dropped me when Jock went to prison. Some had died; others had

drifted off in the wake of their husbands to govern various parts of the Empire; others had agreed to grow old and were patiently gardening in deep tucked away corners of England, behind the impenetrable calm of rose tinted walls. That lot lived for their children and grandchildren and their roses or for the Women's Institute. They were the wise ones. They cut up calico into petticoats and aprons. They gave the Vicar roast beef and Yorkshire pudding on Sunday, and they laid their peaceful limbs to rest at night, with their windows open to the safe, protected, shrouded English heavens, and so they were lost to me. But I still had some old friends left—and I'd made some new ones—women like myself, childless, husbandless, who still felt young and agreed to pretend to each other that they still were young. There was Rosie and Jane and Violet, for instance. Rosie at sixty had the figure of a girl of sixteen; she stood on her head every day for twenty minutes and waved her legs in the air. I used to stand on my head too; we all did. We had special mattresses for the purpose and wore "maillots" when engaged in these exhausting antics. The idea was to strengthen the abdominal muscles, reverse the natural position of the upright animal that walks on two legs, and so keep your inside from dropping. Jane, too, passed for ten years younger than she was. She danced the Charleston and Black Bottom with

fervour and agility. The expert who lifted her face for her considered her a great credit to him. She couldn't smile very well, but then, she didn't particularly want to! She whistled instead. "My mouth looks as if it whistled so I'd better learn to whistle," she said looking into my mirror one day, and she began then and there. She was a woman of great decision. Violet was too fond of food to keep her figure, but her fat didn't interfere with her fun. She had the best table in Paris and was surrounded by the type of cosmopolitan gourmet who lives for his palate and pays for his dinner with wit. Her little dinners were exquisite and flavoured very subtly with curious spices. The talk and food and wine made a harmony, beautifully calculated to excite and stupefy.

And there was Marcella to keep things going when our spirits sagged, Marcella Mackintosh who was born in Kansas City and struck Paris at the end of the war. She organised our lives for us. All you had to do was to ring up Marcella and say, "I'm bored to death," and your house would fill instantly with people. Negroes and harlequins and clowns would pound on the door; wizards and conjurors would pop out of taxis; barmen would set up a bar in the hall, and an orchestra would set up its music racks round the piano. Princes and Grand Dukes, cocottes and midinettes, English lords and American millionaires would pour in, take the floor, and Marcella, round as a

pumpkin, terrible to behold in her mannish coat and skirt, with her face like a suet pudding and her eyes like currants, would plump herself down on the piano stool and then—well, then madness would fill the room. It came from her fat fingers that pounded out, pounded out the irresistible, insistent, syncopated rhythm of the tom-tom. Faster and faster, louder and louder, wizard fingers, wizard hands, monstrous, magical, they scrambled like fat white mice over the ivory keys, but they were made of iron, they had the strength of steel hammers. They galvanised the saxophones, and the Swanee whistles and the drummers into a frenzy. The negroes clustered round Marcella swayed and sweated, and shook; and we shook. Everyone began shaking, everything in the room would begin to shake, the floor, the pictures on the wall, the flowers. The crystal pendants of the lustres began dancing, and Marcella would shout through the din, as more and more people arrived. "Hello! Hello there! Hello, Reggie! Hello, Sally! Hello, Annabelle and Charlie! Hello there, hello!"

We didn't look quite like savages. We weren't black and we weren't quite naked. The men looked almost like men, those who didn't look like young women, and the women looked almost like young women, those who didn't look like men; and we were all decently masked, all partially disguised; and we pretended quite well on the

whole, even when Marcella was not at the piano, to be happy and to be fond of each other. Marcella told us we were happy, she kept telling us we adored each other. She went about Paris yelling the news: "Hello! Isn't it fine? Isn't it bully? Hello, isn't it great? Don't you adore that woman? Don't you think he's grand, this man? Isn't she the most beautiful thing you ever saw? Hello, hello there!"

She drove us to it, whipped us on, spurred us on and kicked us on. Like a herd of cattle she drove us out across France to Biarritz and into Italy, and back again through the streets of Paris; sex-ridden hags with faces painted to look young, languid youths without sex who were ready to pretend to be lovers; waiters who pretended to be Spanish grandes, and Spanish grandes who pretended to be waiters, Jews out of Russia and dress-makers from the Champs Elysées who pretended to be Princes of the blood, and Grand Dukes who pretended to be dressmakers; thieves who endowed charities, murderers who wept when their lap dogs got stepped on, Lesbians who made love to old men with big bank accounts; we were a merry motley crew.

What was I doing in that galère? I don't know; I can't remember. I know that to be eligible you had to possess some taint, some shameful secret, or be surrounded by the glorious aura of some public scandal that took from you your title to

respectability. Marcella was all out to destroy respectability, morality, decency, privacy and silence. She was the apostle of anarchy, the prophet of the beast, the inspired devotee of vice. She'd come out of Kansas City like a whirlwind to set the old world topsy turvy; like the ten plagues of Egypt she swept over Europe, leaving a desert behind her. She destroyed Paris. She filled its streets with noise and made the pale grey stones of its beautiful proud eighteenth century houses echo and shake with American Jazz. Paris went down before her. The head waiter of the Ritz Palace cringed to her. The men at the bourse did her bidding. The shopkeepers of the Rue de la Paix gazed after her grotesque figure with longing. Jewellers and modistes and the Princes of the world of design, plotted and schemed to seduce her, and the people who had made Paris, the old shy exquisite people of taste who had built it, carved it and smoothed it and given to it the patina of a lovely bibelot, fled from her. They fled into their dim houses, the gates clanged behind them, and Paris saw them no more. It was emptied of Parisians and delivered up to Marcella and her gang of marauders as it had been to the Germans in 1870.

And with it all, she was a humbug. The new type of adventuress who made capital out of her comically simple ugliness as her forerunners had done out of their beauty; she nevertheless held

aloof in the midst of us, was back home all the time in Kansas City waiting at the front door of a brand new house in a Ford car, with a bag of peanuts beside her and a bunch of bananas. She didn't in the least believe in anarchy or immorality. She wasn't in the least enamoured of vice and obscenity. She was simply a vulgar and secretly a sentimental woman, earning her living as best she could.

Her career was an accident, she could play the piano, and she looked a clown. She had an enormous chest and an enormous voice and everyone laughed when they saw her; the rest followed. The war was over. The nations were tired of blood and thunder and the groans of the dying. Principally they were simply tired. They wanted to laugh. Marcella made them laugh. They wanted to be galvanised into a semblance of vigour. Marcella did it. But her own vitality was an illusion, her energy a myth, her laughter a great bellow of agony. She was a sick woman. She was sickening of a mortal disease while she banged out the tunes that set us all jiggling, shook hands with the hearty grip of a good-humoured giant and shouted, "Hello! Isn't it great! Isn't it grand? Hello, Carol—hello there!"

Poor wretched roystering Marcella Mackintosh. Homesick clown, heartsick clown, dead to the world with the fatigue of the enormous effort required of her. She thought of herself, I believe,

as a priestess of a great Pagan God. She was nothing but a caricaturist, an unconscious artist in travesty. Everything she held up to us died, or was transformed into a caricature of itself. Humour died at the sound of her laugh, wit bulged into banality at a breath from her, sex, the Goddess she exalted, died of inanition from her handling.

She adored me for a year, tolerated me for another, then dropped me. Jock's scandal was my title to her favour, and I had money. I could pay and I did pay, and so long as I paid Marcella adored me. She went through Europe yelling how grand I was. She said I was the *Ninon de l'Enclos* of the twentieth century. She said that at fifty I had more sex appeal than any woman in Paris. She said every man she knew was in love with me. It was meant as flattery, and I accepted it, and I accepted her, and she was Sonia's friend.

Maggie was dead, and David was gone, and I spent my time with Marcella Mackintosh, who loved Sonia, who'd made Sonia, who'd found Sonia in a shop and married her to a nincompoop with a provincial title. She loved Sonia hopelessly, desperately, with a hideous sentimentality, would blubber if Sonia was unkind, would become a cheerful idiot if Sonia were nice.

It is dreadfully bewildering. Who was I? What was I?

When I was young I shuddered at the sight of

old women, grimacing through their painted masks at young men. Was I to become one of those? Was it the sight of myself that made the girl shudder? What had happened in between? That's what I'm trying to get at. But I do not know what happened. Maggie was dead and David was gone. That's no explanation. There'd been a war and I'd been nursing for four years in a field hospital. That's none either. Hang it, everyone was friends with Marcella, you couldn't live in Paris and not be, if she wanted to be. If she said a thing was to be, it was. If she said you were her best friend you were. Anything was better than being alone. Marcella was an absolute guarantee that you never would be. Well then—? And she seemed a good sort, even if one knew she wasn't and she was friends with everybody one knew, even with the Abbé. If the Abbé liked her—but did he?

“Hello, Abbé,” she'd shout and slap him on the back with a force that nearly knocked the frail little man over. Poor Abbé, trotting along the pavements of Paris in search of his lost sheep, he had run into Marcella. He was bound to, he couldn't avoid her. He was looking for Sonia. Sonia's soul was precious to him, and he was responsible for her soul as a shepherd is for his sheep. So he hurried after her through those haunts of Marcella's, and his little brown figure in its shabby cassock would appear in houses

where Marcella banged the piano. But he didn't let the noise disturb him. He would sit very quiet, perched on a chair near the band, his head a little to one side, and smile with that subtle radiance, and Marcella would shout to him through the din when she saw his small brown skull poked round the door.

"Hello, Abbé, hello! Come on in. Glad to see you!"

They were rivals for Sonia. They were the priest and priestess of two gods who disputed the world. Under the beat of the drums and Marcella's piano, you felt the tension. Worlds, dark, deep and mysterious opened out behind them, under them, above them. And they wielded, both of them, the weapons of very old powerful superstitions.

I remember a glass floor in a casino where we used to dance sometimes. It was of slightly opaque glass and we saw ourselves reflected in it from below, vague figures, moving in circles upside down, over an abyss. It gave one a queer sensation—the sensation of dancing on a transparency, thin as a shaving, over a vast world of shadow, and that's how our life in Marcella's world seems to me now—as I look back.

But it didn't seem like that when I was in it. It seemed, on the contrary, quite normal, quite exceptionally efficient as a scheme of pleasure. Its appearance was brilliant. It promised excel-

lent amusement and it kept its promise. Marcella's gang were well trained in parlour tricks. They danced beautifully, made love gracefully, played expert bridge. They were indeed such expert performers that one forgot in one's delight at the performance who they were, what they were, how old they were and how hopeless they were. I didn't notice, for instance, when Philippe began to make love to me that he looked exactly like a grasshopper. I forgot that he was sixty and that I was fifty. I was under the impression that we were young and happy and in love, and this illusion lasted until Tawaska came to see me and told me about David.

That was the shock that startled me into awareness. I couldn't bear that, about David. I found it unbearable. But it was a fact, and I could do nothing to change it, yet something had to be changed.

Tawaska said, "If you are alone, be alone, go away by yourself, and face the spectacle of yourself." But when he'd gone, I couldn't do it, I hadn't the nerve. I went to the Abbé instead. "Give me something to do, Abbé," I said, "I am desperate." So he gave me his poor.

"Prenez mes pauvres, mon enfant—they will relieve you of the burden of yourself." They did for a time, but there were a great many children among them, dingy buildings full of sallow children with mournful patient eyes such as dogs

have, and I was haunted by David Dawson. I'd meet him in the long corridors, fancy that I saw him as I'd once seen him when I went to his school, hurrying to meet me in his long grey flannel trousers and crimson cricket blazer, his face flushed, his hair bleached by the sun, his shirt open at the throat. He had looked like a young laughing sun god that day. He was just nine years old. The sun was in his hair, in his eyes, in his damp rosy golden skin, and he had come quickly, moving in his loose clothes, with an incomparable easy grace, and had grinned shyly from a distance.

Tawaska and David Dawson drove me out of Paris in the end. It's because of them that I sit here alone trying to remember, trying to find out how it all happened.

I can't do it. I can't trust my memory. I don't know what happened. Even the few facts I thought I could swear to, how can I swear they are true?

Even when I describe what I know that I do remember, I am not describing a real thing. My memory is not a kodak. It's a paint brush held in the uncertain hand of a nearly blind painter who is half asleep. When I state a fact about myself, I am sure that the contrary is often equally true. I will state now, for example, that I married when I was thirty-one, but had a son two years earlier, and that from 1910 on was involved in a

succession of love affairs first with one man then another. These are facts of a sort. But their contradiction is truer, namely, that I had one lover only and was never married, and never had a child. Or again I might almost say that I never had husband or lover but remained a virgin, and am now an old maid. And if I try to reconcile these statements, then something is lost, or if I choose one set of facts and discard the others, I'm lying. But if I had to choose, in regard to marriage, for instance, I'd be obliged to choose as the most true the fact that my marriage was no marriage, that I remained intact and solitary and barren. As for my boy, he was born certainly. I know it because he was in me, fighting to get out, and then afterwards gone, and I was light and empty, but I never saw him. He only lived for an hour, while I was asleep, and was dead when I woke up and they didn't show him to me. Maggie wanted to, she was with me, but the nurses and the doctors wouldn't allow it. They said I was too weak to stand the shock of having a very small corpse put into my arms. So they lied to me, and I kept expecting him for a while, then found the little thing was buried. There's a tombstone in a village churchyard near Montreux. I almost forgot that. I've not seen it for more than twenty years. You see how that was, you whoever you are to whom I am writing this letter. I never had a child of my own. I had Maggie's

boys instead, and David for a very special friend.

And I tell you, whoever you are, that Life is hideous and the spirit of Life an evil magician, who holds a drugged cup to our lips, coaxes us to take a sip, then another; teaches us to drink, then when we get to like the stuff, rubs its hands, the sly old devil!

PART II

CHAPTER I

It is impossible. The thing's a failure. I can't change. I might as well have stayed in Paris.

Everything's gone, done with and finished. I'll never go back to it. I tore myself out of it, came away, left it all, every familiar face, street, object, and I'm no freer, no lighter, no different. With nothing left, I'm exactly the same. With nothing to do, I behave over nothing exactly as I did over everything. It is hopeless; I'm getting nowhere; I'm simply frantically bored.

That brute Tawaska expects too much. It's all very well for him. He's a man of ice. He brought a chill like the air off a glacier into my nice warm house in Paris. I went cold. When he'd gone I sat there with my teeth chattering. My maid found me. "Mon Dieu, madame, vous êtes malade?" "No, Marie, no, I'm cold, that's all, I'm so cold. Light the fire. Bring me a tisane. No, a hot toddy. Get my bed ready. Put a hot bottle in it." She was a good maid. I was soon lying between smooth scented sheets behind my taffeta curtains with the birch logs crackling, the firelight glinting on all my pretty things, and hot rum scalding my inside, to make me drowsy—to make me forget Tawaska and David Dawson.

Why did I come here? To face the spectacle

of myself in my own solitary company. Well, I can't face it. I can't endure solitude. I can't do any of the things I set out to do. I can't even remember. To say that I remember is simply not true. If I remembered it would all come back; I would jump from this moment and this spot and be somewhere else; some bit of what I call the past would be now, and this present moment in this New England village would be far away and dim. To remember is to recreate something exactly as it was, to bring it to life again.

Well, I can't do it. I can recall to life no one and nothing that is gone. They are gone, that's all. And to say that Buckhaven Park or my house in Knightsbridge is as real to me now as this room is nonsense. Even such phrases as "It seems like yesterday," are rubbish. Yesterday I walked five miles along the coast and five miles inland to a lake fringed with pines and birch trees. It is quite a pretty lake. I hated it. The country round is boisterous, breezy, vigorous country. I dislike it. The trees and bushes spring from the soil with a great bouncing vitality. The road bounded up and down above the rocky shore between dense dusty ragged hedges of sumach and dogwood. Everything hummed and sang, the sea, the wind, birds, telegraph wires, mosquitos, bees. I passed a bee farm advertising white clover honey. I passed new yellow farmhouses, old white farmhouses, red barns bursting with hay, weather-

stained barns with sagging walls, country houses with wide verandahs, gasoline stations, ice cream parlours, cabins advertising clams. Motors whizzed past covering me in dust. I lunched on raspberry shortcake at a cross-roads. Nothing that I saw twenty years ago is as vivid as yesterday. Nothing of all that is gone has the reality of this detestable prim little room furnished by Miss Elizabeth Perkins, with its lithographs in oval gilt frames, its French gilt clock that doesn't go, and its cheap brass fire-irons. Nor has anyone I have ever loved the immediate convincing effect of Joanna. Joanna is alive and she is here, a stranger with a voice like wind in a cave, come over from Sweden to make chicken croquettes and sticky gingerbread for my supper; a large, obstinate disapproving woman with a frosty gaze and sandy hair, who worships a foreign God and thinks I've gone out of my mind. She doesn't interest me, but there she is wiping her big red hands on her apron, making a great splash over her dish-washing, and every now and then she tells me about Miss Elizabeth's journey in foreign lands.

Miss Elizabeth was in Holland the last I heard. She had gone from Rotterdam to Delft by canal; she was enchanted by the windmills; she is going to England in August. I wonder where she will stay in London and what she will see. Will she go to the play? Or is the theatre a forbidden joy

to her? Will she see Gerald du Maurier and Gladys Cooper? It is odd to think of Eliza Perkins sitting in the dress circle of St. James's Theatre, tripping up the steps of the National Gallery with her Baedeker in her hand, and trotting down the long rooms of the British Museum to see the Elgin Marbles and the mummies from Egypt. Perhaps she'll see the big coiled snake, the Mexican one in stone. Maybe she will go past my house. She wouldn't notice it, but her little figure would be reflected in its blank windows all the same. What would she think, I wonder, if the ghost of my manservant flung open the door and summoned her in to view, not the dismantled rooms, but the life I once lived there? I think she would be very upset. I think she would hurry away in a wild, absurd flutter of misery. I am sure she would say to herself: "Oh dear, oh dear, can such things be possible?"

The truth is I envy Eliza Perkins. I envy her the quick heart that beats in her withered chest; I envy her ignorance, her capacity for surprise and delight, her gift for being shocked. She was struck all of a heap by the Dutch windmills, the Delft china, the canals. She's a pernickety tiresome little old bore, but she lives in a fresh, sparkling world, and I suspect that she knows more about reality than I do. Her memories, I'd wager, are as clear as crystal. I think it would be grand to be like that, a ridiculous old maid

who fled in horror from the houses of people like Caroline Merryweather.

Suppose I sent her this letter, or left it for her to find when she comes back? I can see her pinched face go crimson, hear the papers rattling in her hand before she puts them in the fire. Never mind, Eliza, never mind; I won't do anything so unseemly and unkind.

* * * *

To say that I'm alone here is nonsense. I'm merely ignored, which is quite a different thing. This village, filled with golfing youths and summer girls and motors and buckboards, takes no interest in dark, tall, old women, but I take a hungry, prying interest in it. The beautiful, asinine, hilarious youngsters who go past my gate shouting and swinging their tennis rackets fill me with curiosity. I sit day after day on the verandah screened by the Virginia creeper and peer at them through the greenery and wonder about them and try to imagine what they say to each other and do together. I know there's nothing interesting about them but I can't keep my eyes off them, and in the evenings when the village is shadowy and the sound of music comes tinkling and strumming down the street, I feel like screaming. I hate those amorous tunes; I hate the moonlight that drifts down through the branches of the big elms; I hate the scent of the

air. It is all hateful. It makes me laugh. Sometimes I laugh all by myself, immoderately, and that old, loud, raucous laugh of mine that rattles behind me through time like a tray falling down a staircase, goes banging about among Eliza Perkins's bric-a-brac.

When this sort of thing becomes intolerable, when I can't bear to sit any longer in my own company; although I dislike this place, although it means nothing to me, I hold out a beggar's hand to it, timidly, with a humble, ingratiating smile on my face. I go down the village street and chat with the girl in the Post Office. I pass the time of day with the butcher and the fishmonger, or I go to the harbour and hang about there listening to the yarns of the old salts who sit in the sun chewing tobacco and spitting into the water. The harbour is crowded with fishing smacks and little sailing yachts. Penobscot Bay is dotted with white sails. Far out, a square-rigged schooner is coming down from Bangor. It reminds me of Cowes, of days in the Solent with Hugo. I drift off again into a dream.

I am lonely, but I am incapable of existing alone for a day or an hour, and so since there's no one here to take an interest in me, my ego multiplies itself to people my empty entourage with friends. I am become for myself my own most subtle flatterer, my most sympathetic confidant, the ablest of counsels in my own defence,

and I carry on endless confabs with myself and argue over and over again the question of my responsibility.

I doubt the impulse that brought me here. I don't believe, after all, that I did it as an experiment. I think I came simply because I'd nowhere else to go. California swarms with Merry-weathers. I can't face them. They wouldn't know what to do about me. As long as I stayed where I belonged in Europe, they were decent to me, but if I went back and said I'd come to settle down in California, they'd be very uncomfortable. I don't blame them. There'd be a great hullabaloo in the papers. I can't go back there now. Where can I go when I leave here? I don't know. I might start out, I suppose, on another world tour, as Millicent did when her life went to pieces. I can see her turning away at the door of the Embassy Club and walking off up Bond Street, heading for China and the Philippines. O God, O God, these old women starting off on their world tours in their sable coats with the livid light of a wintry afternoon in Bond Street showing up the paint on their faces! Am I one of those? It's too small, this world. It takes no time to get round where you started from. China, the Philippines, Singapore, India, Burma. I've done all that. I was there just the other day. It's finished for me. Everything's finished, but my life that goes on in spite of me.

To say my life's finished is the biggest lie of all. It goes on in exactly the same way. I've exactly the same illogical attitude towards time that I always had, the awful feeling of regret and loss as it rushes past at lightning speed, combined with an impatient sense of hurrying forward to meet the next moment because of what it may bring me. I look forward every day to to-morrow just as I always did, hoping for something nice to happen. I know it won't, that makes no difference. I hope all the same, simply because I can't live without pleasurable expectations of some sort. Complete isolation, unhappiness, or indifference, are alike impossible. Since I've no big interests left, I invent little ones. I've nothing to do, but I cannot do nothing, so I write, play patience, and I think I'll buy a gramophone.

Sometimes at night, lying awake in the dark, I wonder; "How long could I keep my identity, suspended, alone, in complete, soundless, motionless darkness?" Even the question is intolerable. I cannot conceive of the bare existence of myself. I know that I have no bare existence. Darkness: what do I know of it? In the darkness that I know here at night I am comforted by the sensation of Miss Elizabeth's pillow and the sound of the creaking of her old bed. Sometimes for a while I forget where I am and lie "listening in" to the past and little far-away voices come to me. Sometimes it is the Abbé speaking, sometimes it

is Maggie, Hugo, Jock or David. Sometimes a voice that I cannot identify calls faintly like a man in the mountains. Then atmospherics interrupt.

“You’re a lovely girl, ain’t you?” That’s Jock talking to his favourite hunter.

“Damn it, I don’t like those eyes of yours. You’re up to some devilment.” Now he’s talking to me.

Hugo’s gentle, apologetic whisper interrupts him.

“Good night Carol my child. You’ll pop straight into bed, won’t you? Just make sure that there’s no one about, will you?” Parting the curtains I look out at the deserted London street, see the wet pavement under the street lamps. Presently a door closes softly, surreptitiously; footsteps sound outside my window, such dreary footsteps. Then a bolt is shot, a chain rattles. I’ve let my aged lover out.

Hugo was my love, my first love, probably my only love. I doubt his existence. His birthday was on the 19th of September eighty-five years ago. I know that, but I doubt his existence, all the same. There is nothing about him that I’m certain of. I think he was a very tall, grey man with mournful eyes like a mastiff, a drooping moustache and a charming smile, but I’m not sure. I think he’d been a great rip in his youth, but that was only

what people said. I think he had enormous possessions, owned half of one of the northern counties, and that his family had always helped to govern England, but perhaps it wasn't true. I can't remember him. I can't recall his face. I don't know why I loved him or whether I loved him or not. It seems to me that it began as a sort of hero worship, that I was dazzled by his name, his social and political importance, that I was breathless with excitement when I first met him, but that seems so very odd now that I cannot quite believe it was the same man who slunk off down the street hugging the shadows of the houses like a thief. If it was real, if he was real, if he was really my love, how could it be like that? Love is respectable. It's a thing that endures. It's a thing one should be proud of—at least, I should think so, but I doubt whether I know anything about love.

I don't think I loved Jock, the man I married. I think I hated him, but I'm not sure. He was very beautiful as I remember, and could scarcely write his name, and I think he hated me, too, but I'm not certain of that now. It is all so very confused. He had such a queer, rough way of talking.

"What are you doing at the window? Come back to bed, there's a good girl." I hate the voice. I hate the man it belongs to. I've hated the thought of my wedding night so intensely that

I've almost wiped it out of my mind, but that voice comes back sometimes—and my own.

"Keep off, Jock. Don't touch me. It was agreed—you agreed—I won't, I can't—I told you."

"You won't, won't you? You can't, can't you? You tell that to someone else, my girl. You married me, didn't you? Had to marry someone, so you picked me, wasn't that it? Well, you made one big mistake, and that was in tellin' me what you did tell me. See? It was a damn silly thing to do. See? 'Cause you can't bluff me now, and you needn't try. By God, you little devil, if you try any tricks with me you'll be sorry. You're mine now, and I'm going to see that you're mine." The two grapple. They struggle. She is flung on the bed, a large gilt bed with wide, smooth, white sheets in a room in a Paris hotel, a big room with white walls and blue damask hangings. They've been to the races, those two, went to the Grand Prix for their honeymoon, twenty-three, no, twenty-five years ago, it was.

"When I see him at the second fence, I knew he'd win." Jock's grammar was always rocky, but he couldn't have said that at Longchamps. It must have been at the Grand National the year after.

It is dreadful hearing Jock's voice. I shut my ears to it, listen in another direction, listen, listen, and I see myself standing afar off in the distance

in the attitude of a listener, standing nowhere in particular, on a sort of prairie, with no one in sight.

Maggie's hoarse little voice sounds sometimes if I wait, and sometimes David's, young, soft, sturdy little boy's voice, fresh as morning air, keenly sweet to me, as some bird's notes are, but manly, absurdly defiant of the world, with the ring of an N.C.O.'s commands in it, miniature echo of authority, lovely burlesque of the warrior. He was a warrior, a very small one with a curly mouth, stern golden brows, exquisite down on his cheeks and a fiery sword flashing through the limpid innocence of his blue eyes.

Maggie's voice comes hoarsely over the rim of the world. "What's it all about, Lina? Why do we do what we do? Tell me, for God's sake, why nothing happens the way we meant it to. What's it all about, this thing called Life?"

David answers. He knows. He is nine years old, and he knows that life is all about heroic endeavour and goodness and truth and courage and honour and glory hardly won. It's in the *Boy's Poetry Book*, and he recites it to me. If I listen carefully and hold my breath I can hear in the night the words of those songs sounding again. They ring out through the dark like a small, distant clarion; thrilling are the accents given to them by someone very small, who knew life was a glorious and noble adventure.

Then out spake brave Horatius
The Captain of the Gate
" To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late.
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds
For the ashes of his fathers
And the temples of his Gods."

" Horatius at the bridge is my favourite; what's yours, Aunt Lina?" His face would go crimson, his eyes a darker blue.

" Well, I don't quite know, David. The Charge of the Light Brigade, maybe, or the Assyrian came down like a Wolf on the Fold, or Paul Revere's Ride."

But he was contemptuous. " Oh, I don't like those half as much as Horatius or Ivry. I think Lord Macaulay's much the best poet in England, I think he's miles better than Milton or Shakespeare."

" Say a bit of Ivry, David."

" Hurrah, the foes are moving. Hark to the mingled din
Of fife and steel and trump and drum and roaring
culverin;

The fiery Duke is pricking fast across Saint André's
plain

With all the lurching chivalry of Guelders and Almagne.
Now by the lips of those ye love, fair gentlemen of
France

Charge for the golden lilies, upon them with the lance!"

Fast, very fast he used to say it, words tumbling after each other from his lips, but clearly enunciated, with a great emphasis, a note sounding like the beat of a drum, and I wonder now why Maggie didn't listen, didn't hear. It didn't occur to her that he could answer her question.

Such queer, long nights I have here. How very far I go sometimes in my wanderings. It's like tramping the sky, among the stars.

When it becomes too painful and I cannot sleep, I turn on my light and open a book, or begin talking to myself. I say to myself, "In five hours it will be daylight, I shall never see David or Maggie again, but I shall see the daylight. Soon the sun will rise and I shall see the sunrise. Soon the frightening night that is so deep will close and float away. Soon the birds will begin their rustling and chirping. Soon that old rooster of Joanna's will salute the dawn, God bless him. Soon I can get up and take a cold bath."

Just now I am looking forward to my tea. I hope that it will be good. I've a new box of special Orange Pekoe from Sherry's. It came to-day. I hope that Joanna will this time bring the kettle to the boil and not spoil the flavour, and I hope that she'll have a bit of news for me about Miss Elizabeth or the village. I've come to look forward with intense expectation to Joanna's

brief visits, and if she doesn't give me a bit of gossip about the family across the street, I feel cheated. The father who sits out on the front steps in the evenings in his shirt-sleeves keeps a drug-store and has rheumatism. The mother who sits in a rocking chair all day, rocking and rocking, has heart disease. The daughter works in the bank. On Sundays she goes off with her young man in a Studebaker car. They're going to be married in October and move to Portland, Maine. Why am I interested? I'm not interested. Yes, I am, vastly so, as a drowning man is interested in the end of a rope. They relieve me of the unbearable burden of myself, just as the cat does, Eliza's cat. My cowardice has brought me to this. I have lured the sleek beast to my small cold hearth with saucers of cream. She is sitting now with her back to me staring into the empty fireplace, and the room is less suffocating, the moonlight outside less frightening because of her. If I speak to her she doesn't answer. Her soul is in old Egypt somewhere, or flying through the night on a broomstick, but her feline heart is beating and so is mine. We have this in common and I'm comforted. And though she reminds me exasperatingly sometimes of Sonia, especially when she stretches, yawns and walks towards me in her slow, stealthy, smooth way, I can think more placidly when she sits there of the little things

that I'll do to-morrow.

You see how it is, Tawaska, you've tried me too high. You expected too much, and you've used the wrong language. You said I was asleep, that I was fighting with shadows and chasing shadows in a dream; and you said there was absolutely nothing to do about it, nothing worth doing but work on oneself, work ceaselessly, work definitely, laboriously, go against every habit, every craving, every fear, every hope and every pleasure, and watch like a lynx every action—to what end? For the purpose, I take it, of breaking through the dream. But all that is beyond me. I can't do it. Can't even understand it. And there's no reward, or if there is, it is too awful to contemplate.

You should have talked to me in the language of the Bible. You should have promised peace, you should have talked to me of Holiness and of God. You should have said the word Innocence, and the word Light—Light in Darkness—and you should have told me that Jesus Christ was crucified because I, Caroline Merryweather, am lost in a dark, endless night.

Childish things, that's what I want. I want to be told childish things in such a way that I can believe they are true. Because it is all so dark—because everything is lost and gone into darkness.

You'll see, I think, what I mean.

CHAPTER II

HYDE PARK is gay on a sunny June morning. Flocks of sheep are grazing in the rural distance that spreads behind parasols and furbelows, top hats and the gleaming flanks of horses. Coachmen and grooms are smart in cockades; Edward, Prince of Wales, rides in the Row; the little old Queen bows from her carriage and the throng bends like a bright herbaceous border swept by a pleasant breeze.

It is the end of a long day, the comfortable day of the formidable old woman who will die of South Africa, and my mother and I have arrived in London. The shapes of hats, perched high above coiled hair, of puffed sleeves and long skirts, date the picture in my mind. Lord Salisbury is Prime Minister, Lord Lansdowne Minister of War; Joseph Chamberlain is beginning his Empire Crusade. Hugo has won the Derby and the Two Thousand Guineas. The bicycle craze is on the wane. I pedal to Richmond in long skirts, a belted shirt-waist and stiff sailor hat, but the Paris Exhibition is preparing the debut of the horseless carriage. My mother and I run over for a week-end among the sugar-cake pavilions on the banks of the Seine. I buy one of the new machines and dash about the Bois

with a great hooting and rattling. The old Duchess of Devonshire is there. She keeps going round and round on the trottoir roulant. The Duke spends his days with the agricultural implements; the Shah of Persia is enamoured of a great shell; the quality take tea in the British pavilion.

I see London darken. I hear the thin note of fifes, a thrilling silver cry above the rumble of the traffic. Then the sound of marching. A drum beats. A bugle calling in Wellington Barracks is a summons to the man in the street to ship for South Africa. It is winter now. Buller has been defeated at Spion Kop. The British lion is wounded, and Europe is laughing at him, but I suffer. I have fallen in love with England, and I stand under Nelson's column watching the men in khaki file past, and wish that I could go to the war.

Down in Leicestershire we don't at first notice the war very much, Maggie and I. We share a hunting box and we are happy together.

Hounds bound from a brown copse and go streaming up a ploughed slope, flying streaks of white and tan. Men in pink and women in black flash after them. The hunt unfurls like a ribbon across incredibly green winter fields. The air is sharp with a delicious tang to it. It is like bitter wine. I love it. I am happier than I have ever been in my life.

But in December Gatacre was defeated at Stormberg, Methuen, in relieving Kimberley, was routed at Magersfontein, and Buller, going to the Relief of Ladysmith, was beaten at Colenso. We read these things at breakfast in our riding clothes. The yeomanry was called up. Men disappeared from the hunt. Following hounds across the squelching turf I thought of them on their way to South Africa. Buck settled now at Buckhaven Park, waiting for the divorce to be ratified, went to town for a week in January and came down again, his face black with fury. England had no need of his services. Maggie suffered for this. We went on hunting. What else could we do? I grew hard. Maggie was half dead with exhaustion. She was so tired at night that she was often violently sick after dinner, and like as not she would be sick again in the morning before going out, but out she would go to meet Buck at some park or cross-roads and follow him in his black gallops across country. He lamed half his horses that winter, broke the back of his best hunter in the bottom of a pit, and scarcely spoke two words in a week. On the 29th of February I was hacking home alone and stopped for tea somewhere. I have forgotten the name of the people, but the news of Pieter's Hill and the relief of Ladysmith came over the telephone to the tea-table, and I remember the late sunlight on the convulsed face of a hard-bitten woman in a top

hat who began to bang the table like a lunatic. I bolted for the stable yard. Once safe in the saddle and outside the gate I burst into tears that continued to stream down my face as I trotted home through the darkening winter landscape.

The Boer War and my mother's desire to see me safely settled down in England, do not seem to be reasonable reasons for taking, as a lover, a man old enough to be my grandfather, yet I can think of no others. Time, like some satirical conjuror, when I ask him for an explanation of my conduct, produces for me out of his voluminous sleeves a pack of cards with the printed words: Ladysmith, Spion Kop, Mafeking, and a tattered silk flag. And suddenly I see my mother's house in Grosvenor Square as it was that dark winter of the war, when she had married and gone back to Rome and left me with Maggie in the hunting box Buck took for us, near his place in the Midlands. The big rooms were covered in dust sheets. There was a caretaker to give me breakfast when I came up to town. I liked it that way, empty, very quiet, with the rumble of carriages and clopping of horses' hoofs outside, sounding far away in another world. I remember the queer twilight in the big shrouded rooms with their drawn blinds, the odd look of the chairs and sofas in holland covers and their reflection in the bare, polished floors.

I gave Hugo tea there one day. There he sat,

the great man, with his head on a holland cover. The caretaker bringing in the tea on a tray was very surprised to see what a grand visitor I had. So was I. I had met him on the top of a bus. What was I doing on the top of a bus on a rainy afternoon, he had asked me. I'd said I liked riding up and down the streets alone. But he, what was he? "I'm thinking," he said. "Those chaps in the House give you a lot to think about. The top of a bus is as good a place as I know for that sort of thing." So we had trundled on together through the wet evening streets with the lamps reflected in the mud puddles and lights flaring above the doors of public houses. I remember the mysterious beauty of the Tottenham Court Road, the sense of wild beautiful romance abroad in the streets, and I remember how odd it seemed to me to be perched high under an umbrella behind a bus driver with such a swagger member of the British Cabinet. Afterwards when we sat in the morning room eating hot muffins and strawberry jam, I laughed and chattered a great deal. I've no idea what about, but I see Hugo's smooth silvery head shining faintly in the greenish light, the rain streaming against the windows, the glint of firelight on the tea things, and suddenly I see his smile. It was a lovely thing. It would come flitting across his tired old face like an elf and hover for a moment about his eyes. "Only a very nice man

could smile like that," I said to myself. "He must be a darling." I said it then and I say it now.

We had worked our way back slowly from China, my mother and I, had spent Easter in Rome and reached England in the late spring of 1899. My mother took the house in Grosvenor Square, employed an agreeable young man with good connections as her social secretary, and began at once to entertain. Everything had gone very smoothly, except one thing, her plans for her daughter. The right people had come to her parties, the wrong ones had been tactfully eliminated. Roberto had followed her from Rome to lay his pretty coronet and his ancient castle at her feet, several royalties had been pleased to have dinners and balls given in their honour, and at the end of July my mother had remarked with satisfaction that we'd not had a meal alone for three months. And she added that nothing now stood in the way of her becoming a blissful Roman Princess for the rest of her days, but myself.

"I'm so sorry, darling, but why am I in the way, and what can I do?"

"You can marry, my sweet, if only you would, some nice, sensible Englishman."

"But I can't, darling, truly. No one has asked me."

"Nonsense, Caroline, it's your own fault if

they haven't.

The fact that I was not attractive to men, though patent to everyone else, my mother had always refused to recognise. She had kept up an elaborate, transparent pretence to the contrary; and I had entered into her little game as best I could to please her. I would have done more, much more, to please her. That the little game was apparently successful was due to her charm, however, not to mine. It was her beauty, her childlike innocent gaiety and her millions that attracted the Italian princes, the French counts with large encumbered properties, and the more adventurous type of Englishman, not the personality of her savage daughter. This we both knew perfectly well. The world was full of agreeable people ready to be of service to Mrs. John Merryweather. They turned up smiling wherever we alighted. It was I who kept a sharp eye on her undesirable suitors. She didn't have to protect me. It was the other way round. For although she kept all these men at a very proper distance with her gift for living on the surface of things, I had realised that she was bound to marry again, and feared the poor sweet might make an unfortunate choice. But now it seemed to me that all was well. Roberto was a kind little soul and he had all the appendages my mother secretly hankered after, such as an old castle near Rome, full of ghosts and turrets,

with a moat and a drawbridge. She wanted so much to be a princess and wear a coronet of diamonds on her fair pretty head. Well, I vowed she should be one. Roberto should have her. The time had come to drop pretence, stand out for my own freedom and marry my mother off.

"Must I marry some idiotic man whom I despise," I asked Maggie, "in order to set my mother free?"

"Certainly not."

"But there's a very nice Roman after her, desirable in every way, and she won't marry him unless I'll get married first or consent to live with them."

"Does she want you, and does he?"

"He certainly doesn't, and I don't think she does."

"Then get at him. Tell him you want to live in England as a bachelor girl and that he must work it."

My mother's manœuvres to get me off her hands had been laughable, and I had laughed, but I was often wretched, and often at night I would flush hot in the dark after some particularly unsuccessful effort to enjoy myself at a ball. Now with Maggie to back me I determined to put an end to this sort of thing. I tackled Roberto first, gave him time, then went to my mother. It was always I who tucked her up at

night, put out her light and opened her window before I went to my room, and one night I said abruptly:

“This is ridiculous.”

“What is ridiculous?”

“This situation. Men don’t like me and I don’t like them. There’s not a sign of a husband for me on the horizon, and I don’t want one, but you do. I’m not going to marry, mother, ever, I’m going to be an old maid, a sporting spinster, that’s my line. I shall have lots of dogs about. I’ll have a hunting box in England, and spend my winters riding to hounds and my summers in California. I shall be perfectly happy and perfectly safe, I mean by that perfectly respectable. I’m twenty-six years old and have money to burn. Do you want me lounging about Roberto’s old castle with a lot of dogs at my heels? Of course you don’t. With me out of the way, you’ll be taken for thirty, not a day more. I make you old and worry you to death, and you cramp my style badly. When you’re about I haven’t a chance, no one will look at me. Who knows, perhaps if we separate I may catch a man yet, and change my mind.”

“Carol darling!”

“But it’s true, dearest, it’s true. We love each other but we don’t get on. Your friends don’t like me, Roberto doesn’t want me, and I’ll not spoil your honeymoon. Positively I

refuse to saddle Roberto with a Red Indian step-daughter."

"Carol!"

She looked as if she might weep. I kissed away the tears that moistened her pretty eyelids.

"There dear, there. It's all settled. Go to sleep now and I'll tell Roberto tomorrow that he can name the day."

She sighed. She gave in; almost, as it seemed to me, without a murmur of protest, just as if she were greatly relieved to be rid of me. Perhaps she was. I can see her lying serene on her pillows. Her slender hands are folded under her smooth cheek, her eyelids are already closing as I stand in the doorway, my hand on the light.

"Good-night, darling." The maternal tenderness is in my voice.

"Good-night," murmurs drowsily the big child in the bed. No turbulent or painful emotions, no feeling of loss, or loneliness disturbed her infantile slumbers. It was I who lay awake thinking and wondering, thinking about my beautiful mother and her funny little Prince who looked like a swarthy Mr. Punch with his big nose and pot belly. How, I wondered, could she love him? He was a foreigner, unknown, totally unknowable. Her love affair seemed to have no reality. It was a fairy tale told in a comic vein. It was the castle near Rome, the creaking drawbridge, the dungeons that had

done it. She saw him as a romantic figure, but how could all that make her comfortable in his strange brown arms? I gave it up.

Maggie had not been having an easy time of it, and this had been lucky for me. Her difficulties had brought her back to me. She had come up to town after a month in Portsmouth, and Buck had taken for her a small house in Regent's Park. It backed on to the Canal and she lived in it like an angry little dog on a chain. People were beginning to make things unpleasant for both of them. The Dawson clan was gathering to drive her out of England. Bill Travers filed his divorce in June. Buck immediately sent in his papers to the Admiralty and resigned from his clubs. Lady Travers, Bill's mother, arrived with some sort of order or other, and went off with small William Travers, and the Dawsons let themselves go in blasts of icy fury. Old Lord Buckhaven, less cold perhaps, but the most furious of all, had a stroke the day Buck resigned from White's and the Turf, and died on the spot. The story went round that he had fallen dead at Buck's feet in the middle of a family row. The Dawsons called Buck a murderer and said Maggie was a fool who would find herself badly landed. Buck would never stick to any woman, least of all to a skinny rat of a thing without a bob in the world. They went about saying he kept her. It was true. Maggie's meagre income

for the year had been spent following Buck's ship across the high seas. Now Buck had to pay the butcher and baker.

I didn't like this and told her so. She flew into a rage.

"But what have you got to live on, Maggie?"

"That's my business."

"Don't be an idiot. I've got more than I can possibly spend."

"Do be quiet, Caroline. Buck pays."

"That's just what I was afraid of."

"What's it got to do with you? Why shouldn't he? I like his paying, I tell you. Who else could I take my bread and butter from, anyway? Keeps me, of course he keeps me. I like it, do you hear, I like it."

I hated it. I felt, fatuously, that I knew Buck better in some ways than she did. I reasoned that he was too accustomed to paying for other women to find any romantic pleasure in footing Maggie's bills. What I chose to call her humiliating position might not damage her in his eyes, I told myself, but it certainly would not add to her power over him. If she must love him so desperately, well, she must, but she ought at least to make an effort to keep the whip hand over the brute. It was just this that I felt she did not do. She simply gave herself up to Buck to be eaten alive, and really she did seem to be disappearing. Her elbows and wrists and

shoulder-blades were painful to look at. Her little legs were match sticks. It was a case, I suppose, of being consumed by passion. Well, hers gave her the face of a sick monkey. Her eyes were enormous. "There'll be nothing left of her soon," I thought, "but her eyes and her laugh." Her laughter continued, sweet and defiant. It was very useful to her in managing Buck, useful then, useful later. I didn't envy Maggie. I would come away from the little house in Regent's Park with a stifled sickish feeling, as if I had been in an opium den. "Never for me. Never for me."

But the house where those two devoured each other had nothing of the opium den or *nid d'amour* about it. An ugly box, the property of an elderly bachelor, it was a cosy enough place for a crotchety Englishman, and contained such masculine comforts as leather armchairs too big by far for the drawing room, innumerable brass ash-trays, and a shower-bath, but it was not a decent house for a woman. Maggie didn't mind. She didn't seem to notice. She was a careless, untidy creature anyhow, with a passion for baths, cold and hot ones, but otherwise indifferent to personal comforts. Soft beds, scented sheets, shaded lamps and silk divans, these things never belonged to Maggie. I don't think it ever occurred to her that a pink lamp-shade was becoming, or a certain kind of scent

seductive. She had no use for aphrodisiacs of any kind. All Buck needed she contained for him in her own fiery self. When I think of that love nest, I see open windows, fluttering cretonne curtains, barking dogs rushing out of the little green door, golf clubs, tennis racquets and bicycles crowding the small entrance hall, and Maggie in a tweed skirt and squash hat, laughing with her big eyes burning in her white exhausted face.

I was there a great deal. I escaped from Grosvenor Square to Maggie whenever I could. I must have been a good deal in their way. They didn't show it. They were very decent to me, and always kept up a very casual matter-of-fact manner to each other when I was there. I never saw Buck touch Maggie, or heard him use any term of endearment more expressive than "my dear girl." I suppose he tolerated me for worldly reasons. My mother's house was Maggie's only guarantee of the relative respectability a decent American background can supply to one of our race in London, and Buck considered this important. I had been wrong about his attitude towards her, so were the Dawsons. He did not class Maggie with his other loves. She would be Lady Buckhaven as soon as the divorce was ratified, and he thought of her already as his wife. And so, though he was much of the time like a bear with a sore head, and went black with fury

every time he saw his name on the front page of a newspaper, he squared his jaw and went on with his idea. His idea was to insist upon Maggie's dignity and make his world come to heel. He didn't live in Regent's Park. He lived in his flat in St. James's Street, where she never penetrated. He was very careful as to whom he introduced to her. She didn't go out, wouldn't come even to my mother's parties, and saw only the people he took to Regent's Park. They weren't many but they were the right ones. I can see that now. They were mostly women. He knew his world, did Buck, and the women he chose to introduce to Maggie were great ladies and wise old birds, hardened, humorous old cynics with soft, smooth manners, who had known Buck since he was born, and had watched more love affairs take their course in the world than they could count or remember. Maggie didn't see the point of it all. She grumbled. He had to keep her up to it.

"Lady So-and-So wants to meet you, Maggie. I said you'd give her tea on Friday."

"Oh, bother! Must I? I thought we were golfing."

"She's an old friend of mine."

"Won't she keep?"

"No, she won't." He'd frown, push out his chin. "Mind you're nice to her. None of your tricks like last time."

"What did I do last time?"

"You forgot to come home."

"But I really forgot. I was out with Lina in her new automobile."

"Well, please don't go out on Friday, that's all, and you had better have port or sherry handy. The old girl likes a glass of port or something."

"Does she pick her teeth in public?"

"Dunno, I'm sure. Never noticed. If she does, you may be sure the public doesn't mind."

"It's her privilege, I suppose."

"That'll do, Maggie. You leave this to me and play up."

"Oh, all right."

Buck's ideas about what she could and could not do puzzled her. "He won't go anywhere with me for a week-end in a hotel, but he will take me to stay in strange women's houses. Funny, isn't it? And he wouldn't mind, he says, a trip to Nigeria. That would be different. Africa's all right, but Brighton's impossible. Not that I like Brighton, I only mention it to show you." Later she said, "We're to hunt next winter. This little chapter is at an end." She waved a hand at the small drawing-room. "Buck's lost his cruiser so he's taking to the land. He'll be at Buckhaven Park and I'm to have a house, not too near. He's already found it. I must have someone with me, some woman. The English county isn't London, he says. Foxes

have, it seems, a sharp nose for scandal. Will you come?"

"Let me take the house."

"What about your mother?"

"She's being married in October."

"That's fine. You'll be free. We'll have a grand time. I'll be your chaperon."

Buck saw to everything, and very efficiently. Looking back, I am bound to admire the way he looked after both of us and brought the county round. Buckhaven Park was the big place in that country, and old Lord Buckhaven had hunted hounds there for thirty years. Now Buck was the head of the family. All the same, it wasn't any too easy to force the Dawson clan to be civil to Miss Caroline Merryweather and Mrs. Travers, Buckhaven's lady. But they were. His long-limbed chinless sisters called one after the other, were shown round the stables, and asked us to tea in their several hideous houses. We were taken to the Kennels, introduced to the M.F.H. and the hunt servants, spent an afternoon at Bill Moffat's stables, watched his partner, Jock Bailey, schooling in the paddock, bought a couple more hunters, and the thing was done.

I liked Bill Moffat, the horse-dealer, and I liked his establishment. I wasn't sure that I liked his partner. But the latter was the most beautiful thing on a horse that I've ever seen.

"Rides well, that man, doesn't he?" I said to Buck, standing under the big oak in the middle of the paddock.

"He's the best man with horses in England."

"Who is he, one of the grooms?"

Buck guffawed. "No, he's not one of the grooms. He's Bill's partner, Jock Bailey."

We watched him, as he lazily, gently, exquisitely, took the nervous new horses from Ireland back and forth over the jumps. He seemed to lift them over, without effort, between his long thin knees. After a while he dismounted and lounged over to us. He was tall and very loosely built. He had a small neat narrow head, and a hard brown face. He pleased the eye as a race-horse does. His voice was a shock. It was a rough uneducated voice. I thought "I was right" he's a stable hand, nothing more," and put him there in my mind, among Bill Moffat's grooms.

He became nevertheless one of the group that gathered round Maggie and me.

Maggie said, "What you lose in a ballroom, Lina, you make up on a horse. All the men down here like you. You'd better marry one. Then we can stick together for life."

I remember the night we arrived. Buck had given orders to his agent down to the most minute detail. Our hunters were in their loose boxes, the stud groom was at the gate of the

stable yard, the cook was in her kitchen, the housekeeper on the front steps in a red wig and black bombazine, and the silver kettle was simmering in front of the fire. I remember Maggie lifting the lid of a covered dish on the tea table and saying, "Hot buttered scones. Gee, I'm hungry." Then she looked round the oak panelled hall and smiled, then looked round again as if expecting someone. But Buck wasn't there, and she did not after all eat the buttered scones. She just sat smoking in silence with the firelight on her thin face and a veiled smouldering expectancy in her eyes. He did not come that night. He never stayed in the house. He was a clever man, and a decent sort at that time. I say it though I hate him now.

My mother married her Roberto in London in October, at the Brompton Oratory, having been received just in time into the Roman Catholic Church. She came back to London the following spring, and Maggie and Buck were married from her house in Grosvenor Square in June, 1900. In July I sailed alone for America on the *Oceanic*, the big new ship launched that year. I was free. I was doing exactly what I had wanted to do. I was going home for the summer to spend two long, lovely, solitary months on my ranch, and when it came to going, I didn't want to go at all, and I sat down at the varnished writing table in the saloon of the ship as it moved

down Southampton Water and wrote suddenly, on a wild overwhelming impulse, the first love letter I'd ever written, and I had no business to write it. It was addressed to an old man who had given me no right so to address him. It was an unseemly, uncalled for, unwanted betrayal of emotion, and it might very well have ended this new friendship abruptly, just as my little affair with Buck two years before had ended. Luckily for me, or unluckily, Hugo was different. He was a tired old man, overwhelmed with unwanted responsibilities, bored by immense estates, bothered by a troublesome family, and he was touched by my outburst and he responded. Reluctantly, to be sure, half-heartedly, with all sorts of qualms and reservations, but, well, he answered, and his letter followed me to San Francisco. A very stilted letter, the letter of a shy, fastidious, stiff old man of the world. It said that he had mine and couldn't answer it properly, but he would do so when I got back to England in the autumn, and it ended by saying that his wife would be very pleased if I would come to them in Scotland in October. And so it happened that having at last got home to California, I spent my time there longing to be off again, back again, to England and my English life and my wonderful new friend.

I think if I hadn't written and Hugo hadn't written that I wouldn't remember anything much

now about my state of mind at that time. The letters fix my mood for me. They remain the important things of the summer. Two sheets of paper in a couple of envelopes, being carried as I was carried across the Atlantic and the continent of North America. It took me a week in the train to get to California. I can see the ship distinctly, and New York harbour, my room in the Holland House, the Grand Central Station and the negro porter who made up my berth on the train. I can hear voices calling, "All aboard" and hear a whistle scream in the night. The Hudson River, Cleveland, Chicago, Lake Michigan, Kansas City and the Rockies, flash past. The train roars, rushes on. I'm in it, a girl sitting alone in her section, looking out of the window. Her face is averted. I can't see it. Her heart is locked to me. I can't get into it.

I went to my father's house outside San Francisco, the house I'd been born in. That visit was, I think, one of the objects of my pilgrimage. I spent a queer day there. My cousins drove me over. The gardener had the keys. All the blinds were down. They went up with a startling clatter. I remember climbing the oak stairs, going into my mother's boudoir with its blue damask and white woodwork, remember my father's bedroom, his brass bed was there with a bare mattress on it and beside this the empty closet where his clothes used to hang.

Most of the rooms were still furnished. The tables, chairs and pictures were where they had been left, but the rooms were empty. I hunted, hunted. What was I hunting for? A familiar living thing, something that would make me feel less lost, less strange. I didn't find it. Even the sea beyond the windows was foreign. I stood a long time listening for a sound out of the past, some faint echo. I heard nothing but the silence. I stayed in it as long as I could, then I fled.

I think now that I had cut myself off from it all by writing that letter to Hugo. I think, though this sounds very silly, that I had destroyed something important, a great slab of the past, by doing that, and I think I was in a panic because I had lost irrevocably what I'd gone to recover. I think I must have gone home to get it back, and that when I got there I was frightened to find the place dead, empty, meaningless, and I turned in my tracks and rushed off again, back again across North America and the Atlantic again, to Hugo, who was waiting.

CHAPTER III

WHEN I say that I have forgotten the important things, I mean the sort of private, critical, emotional experience that is usually labelled important by novelists and remembered dramatically by people who write their autobiographies. Powerful impulses that give a clue to behaviour, psychic sources of rage, laughter or love, how is it that men recall such inner crises, ten, twenty, thirty years after? I can do nothing of the sort.

If I pretended to know now what I felt for Hugo thirty years ago, why I threw myself at his head and forced him to become my lover, I would be lying. I do not know. I do not understand my behaviour. I cannot explain how it was that I became an old man's mistress, and if I advance as an explanation that I fell wildly in love with him, I am not convinced that that is true, or if it is true that it is any explanation at all. For it is just this thing called love that I am endeavouring to analyse and put in its proper place in the general scheme of things. What value am I to put on love? The highest or merely the decent, humble one of biological necessity? Am I to conclude after fifty-six years of life that it is the

most sublime fact of human experience, that it lifts us above the human world, a step towards another and higher one, or am I to write it down as no more interesting than hunger or thirst? And if I attach to it the highest value, am I not then obliged to say that I never experienced it? Other people believed I loved Hugo desperately. The more kindly women spoke of my tragic passion, of how it ruined my life, but I cannot honestly lay claim to anything half so important, for how, if I really loved him, could I have forgotten? Durability is surely the test. Sudden passions quickly over are insignificant, however exhilarating and disruptive. A dog in heat is not interesting. Why should a man be or a woman? Why should we spin out of the fumes of our excited sensations so much romantic high falutin' nonsense. That, after all, is what my one grand love affair amounted to. It was a piece of nonsense. It was an elaborate bit of humbug, and now there's nothing left of it, or something so faint and small that it seems like nothing.

And I suppose that if I have an immortal soul, as my dear Abbé believed, or if there is something outside life towards which we are struggling, or if, as Tawaska thinks, we are all asleep, all blind, all less than semi-conscious, and the only single interesting problem presented to us on the earth is the problem of how to open our eyes, then I suppose my plunge into that unseemly dream

affair with Hugo was a mistake. But if there is nothing more than human experience, why should I regret it? I don't. I am merely puzzled. What I regret is that I am left with so little, that it all seems to have been such a waste of energy.

It took energy, that leap. It was a leap across a gulf, the gulf that divides the world of a girl from that of a woman. One can only pass it one way. One can't get back again.

I see the gulf now looking back. It is wide, deep and frightening. It's no good saying it isn't. One may slip and stumble very gradually to the edge, go so far that one cannot turn back, sooner or later one gets to the point where one has to jump. There she is, that girl, myself, shivering on the brink, a defiant, lonely creature, dark, with a glare of white in her eyes and a painful, excited snarl baring her teeth. She is staring across, measuring the distance, trying to discern what it is like on the other side. Then suddenly she jumps.

Why did I do it? That's what puzzles me. Hugo did nothing that could constitute an excuse. He merely noticed me, took a fancy to me, and that apparently made me lose my head. The different stages of our intimacy are recorded in a series of pictures. I first saw him arrive at a race meeting on the box of his famous dark green coach with its four mouse-coloured horses. He

appears as a figure of superlative elegance to my naïve American eyes. He is one of the great sporting peers of England. I watch him from the rails, as he talks to his jockey and Edward Prince of Wales in the centre of the paddock. A month later I met him at a dinner in London, and he deigned to single me out in the drawing-room. It takes no great effort of imagination to see myself as I must have been, a dark excited girl, trembling, her heart beating under the exquisite flattery of the great man's attention. In the winter I heard him speak in the House of Lords. Certainly the war had a good deal to do with my attitude. I think that if England hadn't been involved with the Boers I wouldn't have been involved with Hugo in such an unseemly and unsuitable relationship. The same sort of thing happened on a grand scale in 1914. Private personal effect of mob emotion. But Hugo didn't march off to the war. He merely accepted an uncomfortable seat in the Cabinet, brought to it the immense prestige of his position in the country, and received most of the kicks delivered at the Government by a nation whose nerves were raw.

The mood of that winter, the big national mood of the time, comes back like a remembered storm, as if that dark year had itself a quality as weather has, a definite emotional climate. The news from the Transvaal was like a strong wind tossing the people of England up and down, and the London

scene has in my memory an extra vividness. The crowds in the street show up in the vanished electric glare as if lit by lightning. Not my mother's London, not Mayfair or Hyde Park, but Cockney winter London, roaring under a mantle of fog, pouring down the Strand and up High Holborn, surging round Ludgate Circus. Hugo looms out of that troubled darkness, a figure of shadowy splendour. I hear his quiet voice sounding through the muffled roar, a dry, small, unemphatic voice. He was no orator. No one ever listened to him with a charmed ear. The House listened because he under-emphasised, was quite incapable of attempting to sway or hoodwink them with the eloquence they liked in a more frivolous mood. Their temper just then was anything but that. They wanted a victim for their spleen. Hugo did well enough. His great name and immense possessions made him a particularly attractive target for the Radicals, so he stood up to them, an indifferent, tall old man, being whipped in the face.

I gave him tea in Grosvenor Square two or three times, I think, that winter. My mother, Roberto and I stayed with him at Newmarket in the spring. But nothing had happened, nothing of any sort, when I sailed for America in July, and I think he was very much taken aback by my attitude and, though flattered, very disconcerted. It was weak of him to respond, weak and rather

silly, a bit of foolishness on the part of an old man who should have known better, but I don't suppose that he imagined for a moment the extreme lengths to which the strange young woman to whom he'd taken such an odd fancy, was bound to go.

But it was I who was disconcerted when I arrived at his place in Scotland on my return from America. I don't know what I expected, but I most certainly did not expect to be handed over to the care of his married daughters and completely ignored by himself. He didn't refer to my letter, didn't refer to anything. Indeed, I scarcely saw him. There were a lot of people staying in the house, a big family party and half a dozen men for the shooting and two or three secretaries. Lord Lansdowne came for a couple of nights, I remember, and Joseph Chamberlain. Hugo was out all day on the moors. I could go, too, if I liked. When he came in he would disappear until dinner. I could fume and rage inwardly as much as I pleased, and walk my room and toss in my bed at night, it did me no good. I was expected in that house to behave in a certain way, and I did behave, and Hugo gave me no sign of any but a very benevolent paternal interest. I suppose his aloofness and his apparent indifference aggravated my trouble, made me fancy myself all the more in love with him. It should have brought me to my senses, and I

think that was what he intended the visit to do. It did the opposite. I catch a glimpse of him now, for an instant, at the head of his long table. It is Sunday. We are eating roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. His children and his grandchildren stretch down the long room to either side of the white cloth, and his tall, painfully shy wife with her withered throat and untidy grey hair, sits opposite him. I am not unhappy. Monica and Maureen, the two married girls, dislike me, but I've made friends with their children. I've found my way to the schoolroom. Alastair and John and Teddy like me. We've made very decent bows and arrows. We've dammed the stream under the Castle and built an Indian camp.

“Are you coming out with the guns, Miss Merryweather?”

“I think I won’t to-day, if you don’t mind. I’ve a date with the boys.”

Hugo, coming in one afternoon from shooting, surprised us in our camp. We’d built a bonfire. It was growing dark. I was crowned with feathers, and had a tartan rug over my shoulders for an Indian blanket.

“God bless my soul!” he ejaculated.

The boys sprang from ambush at that moment, hideous in war paint, brandishing tomahawks, uttering blood-curdling yells.

“Don’t spoil it,” I said to Hugo. “I’m Eagle Feather, Chief of the Cherokees.”

Monica, who was with her father, stared at me out of her pale eyes. "You make a perfectly ripping savage," she drawled.

Hugo's wife took me with her into the walled garden the last morning of my visit and made me hold her basket while she snipped away at the roses and dahlias. She didn't say anything that wasn't perfectly banal. She was very formal, very gentle and very dull. An extremely plain, scraggy woman, spectral somehow, with a sort of ghostly grandeur showing through her ugly clothes. I can see the late roses glowing, her stained gardening gloves, her ugly hat, and the towers of Hugo's house looming behind the beech trees the other side of the wall. The vines had turned crimson; yellow leaves were falling in the park. The gardeners were raking them together and making fires. The white pungent smoke rose softly through the frosty sunlight. I think I nearly broke down that morning. I think my hostess's monotonous voice maundering on about her roses and her grandchildren and Hugo's doubts over the question of the South African farms, very nearly convinced me of folly. I think that if anything could have made me feel the ridiculousness of my romantic passion, it would have been the mild, slightly amused stare of her pink-rimmed old eyes. She was very grand, too, a great lady, almost as grand as Hugo, more so, perhaps.

Strange that her dignity, her sanity, her prosaic

worldly wisdom and her subtle sardonic humour didn't stop me. I think that she was showing me how silly I was in her own special shy way that morning. I think that she was saying to me silently: "My dear—don't be an idiot. Hugo can't give you what you want. He's too old, too tied up to me and his children and grandchildren, too bothered by a thousand and one things. He has no room in his life for a hot-blooded young woman from America. You Americans are very romantic, but there's nothing romantic about him. All that's an illusion. This place with its twenty housemaids and the Prince of Wales coming to shoot, or the stable at Newmarket or his being a Cabinet Minister, is that what impresses you? It shouldn't. It should be a sign to you that poor Hugo is very much a slave and a creature of habit. And really, my dear, I know him, for I've lived with him since before you were born."

It was this, I am sure, that she wished to convey to me with that queer, slightly sour smile twisting her purplish lips. I didn't listen, of course, and didn't myself say anything. If she betrayed nothing, neither did I. I never knew if she minded. I never was with her alone again, though she was always polite to me when we met. Monica and Maureen both cut me dead later on. Their mother never did anything of that kind.

I went straight to a house agent on arriving in London, and a week later had bought the lease of one of those narrow houses in Knightsbridge that have strips of garden at the back running down to the Hyde Park railings. Maggie was mystified.

"But why, Lina?" she asked. "I don't see the sense of it."

"My mother's given up Grosvenor Square. She's less and less keen about London."

"But you're never in town for more than a night or two."

"I know, but I hate staying at hotels."

"Well, I call it silly, and in addition I don't think it's wise."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"In the country you've got us; you're not completely on your own, but in town—"

"Stuff and nonsense, Maggie. For you to preach! What about your house in Regent's Park?"

"That was entirely different. At least, I hope it was." She gave me a sharp, questioning look.
"Lina, what are you up to?"

"Nothing. I want a pied-à-terre in town, that's all. It'll be convenient when I come up to see the dentist."

"If I thought—I believe I'd kill you first."

"Don't be an ass, darling."

I don't think I had any definite scheme in mind

when I took that house. I am sure I didn't think of it as a place in which I could carry on a furtive love affair. I think I was very vague, incredibly vague about the physical aspects of sex and the inevitable consequences of amorous conduct. I think I only wanted to be near Hugo when he was in London and hoped that if I had a house of my own he would come to tea there sometimes, as he had done in Grosvenor Square. I didn't see him again until after Christmas, and wouldn't have seen him then, I suppose, if I had left it to him to make the effort, for he made none. I saw in the papers that he was in town, but he made no sign to me, so after waiting a week I took a cab to Whitehall, walked into his office and told him very quickly and briefly what I thought of it all.

"I'm in love with you, and you know it, and you must do something about it."

Poor Hugo, he was pleased, but his confusion was evident. "Do something about it? What am I to do about it? You are a very surprising young woman, I must say, coming in here in the middle of my morning's work, to order me to do something about you. What I must do at once is get rid of you. I don't want you here. You're a nuisance. I've got the devil of a mess on my hands. That fella Kruger—"

"Never mind all that. That's not important. Nothing's important except me."

"Well, I'm blessed."

"I've got a house of my own now in London. When will you come to tea? To-day? This afternoon?"

"Impossible, my dear child, impossible. There's a meeting—"

"Bother the meeting. I'll expect you at five o'clock in Knightsbridge. Write the number down on that little block."

Such talk argues that I was either very brazen or pretty sure of my ground, but I can't for the life of me recall why I should have been sure. Certain looks he had given me, I suppose, some inflection in his voice, some tremor communicated from him to me, all of which I've forgotten. In any case, I was right this time. I did know what I was doing when I pursued the poor man, and I did get what I wanted, for he did come to tea, and when he'd eaten his buttered muffin and wiped his moustache on his large silk handkerchief, he did take me very gently in his arms and kiss me.

Poor Hugo! He would have been content with that. It was quite enough for him. It left him indeed queerly shaken and tremulous. I keep calling him poor Hugo. But if ever a feeble, fastidious, reluctant old man was the victim of a young woman's cruelty, he was. And yet, strangely enough, I think when I finally, after six months of this sort of thing, forced him to the

final gesture of possession, I think that I believed I was sacrificing myself for his sake, and was being very good to him.

It was all nonsense, of course, all humbug and self-deception. But what was at the bottom of it? What deep basic impulse? The morbid longing of the martyr? A sentimental passion for self-destruction? How do I know? I don't know. I can recall nothing of what I felt, nothing. I can only remember the look of the dreary little room, the tumbled couch, a cushion on the floor, the sound of my dogs whining and scratching at the garden windows, the sound of rain drumming on the roof, of horses' hoofs clopping far off in the street, and when Hugo was gone, I remember flinging open the windows and the dogs rushing in, and how I leaned against the side of the open window and burst out laughing, and went on laughing and laughing, with the rain spitting in my face and the dogs barking and bounding up to lick my hands in a frenzy of stupid, misplaced delight. I've forgotten a deal more than merely my own emotions. I've forgotten the man himself who took me at last and lay down with me. I can't remember what he was like. When I try to see those two figures, mine and his, I see two blurred forms that might belong to any man and any woman, and I see them fumbling at each other as if they were indeed blind or asleep. The girl's face, as usual, is indistinguishable and the

man's face is gone now. It's as if when I kissed him in that moment of abandon I passed a sponge over his features and wiped them out.

Every passionate experience seems to have been for me a sort of death, every sex intimacy a kind of murder. I killed Hugo that day. I cut him in pieces, and I can't now put him together again. The effort to summon him before me after all these years is like sitting in the dark at a spiritualist séance waiting for a ghost to materialise. First a whitish patch appears in the darkness, then suddenly I see his tired, mournful, mastiff eyes, then his drooping moustache; then at a distance a hand forms. I look at the hand, notice that it is the long, withered hand of an old man, bloodless, yellowish at the fingertips, and it makes me ache faintly, and while I am looking at it, the eyes vanish. There's nothing left but the old hand stroking the moustache gently. Then that, too, dissolves.

You'll admit, you whoever you are to whom I am writing, that this isn't much to have left, doesn't make much of a portrait, doesn't constitute much in the way of remains of the very grand, nonchalant, imposing old man who became so unwillingly my first lover. Well, there it is. It's all that I've got of Hugo the lover. Of the other Hugo, who existed before, I've got more. There are, you see, two separate Hugos, perfectly distinct, not to be mistaken one for the

other, and I cannot connect the two. One was a languid public figure. His portraits hang in half a dozen art galleries. Schoolboys will read about him a hundred years from now and be asked to tell what he did or didn't do for England. They will chew their pencils and scowl and try to remember just as I do and get it wrong just as I would were I to write his biography. What is considered a very good "Life" came out ten years ago. I read it with bewilderment. It is going to become a classic, apparently one of the standard works of the late Victorian Edwardian period. There's scarcely a word of analysis in it that seems to me to be true. Hugo's actions are there, an account of his activities, a lot of facts about his public life, but they are so arranged and explained as to present a portrait of someone who I could swear never existed, and yet how can I be sure that I know better? His biographer calls him arrogant, lazy, cynical and gifted with a perverse humour. I would say that he was modest, shy, industrious, childishly naïve in his beliefs and devoid of humour, and I am speaking now, not of the weak, worried old man who showed me in intimacy an agonised, remorseful tenderness, but of the one whom I knew before. So that even this first Hugo seems to be divided into at least two people, or to put it in another way, if you strip him of his possessions and his worldly occupations, a man emerges quite

different from what one expects, a very simple, kind old man, of frugal habits, modest ambitions and childish tastes. He liked stewed prunes and baked apples. He liked horses and stables, the smell of stables and everything to do with stables. He liked birds, and always carried a pair of field-glasses on his walks. He liked being at home alone with his children and grandchildren and his wife. But he liked these simple things because for him they were rare and hard to get, and so became exquisite luxuries. And that after all differentiates him from the man whose mouth waters for *pâté de foie gras* and *champagne*. Hugo had rounded the circle and come back to the standpoint of the farmer, and he shared the tastes of the ploughman, but again with a slight difference, and this difference was marked by sensitiveness. I was one of his luxuries, raw, strong and young. He preferred me to more sophisticated women perversely just as he preferred a mutton chop to any French dish of subtle flavour, but he was very sensitive to my moods, and he brought to our relationship a curious mixture of subtlety and simpleness. It wasn't easy to deceive him. He took a vast deal for granted, but never my feeling for him.

“Are you happy, Caroline?”

“Of course, Hugo.”

“Are you sure that you have no regrets?”

“Quite sure.”

"You are so young and I am so old."

"I love you. It's because you are old that I love you."

"You're very good to me, child."

"I want to be."

"But I don't feel that it's right, you know."

"Nonsense."

"You're a brave girl, Caroline, but—well—I feel an awful cad sometimes."

"Now, Hugo, be quiet."

"What I like so awfully, you see, is just the thing that worries me."

"What's that?"

"Let's call it your innocence. You do it all so beautifully, but you're so shy, you're shy as a hare, aren't you? A shy, young, wild thing caught in a trap. Sometimes you tremble, and that gets me between the ribs, you know, and I have very painful doubts, dreadful doubts——"

Again and again he came back to it. Over and over again I had to reassure him, had to lie to him. For it wasn't true, of course. It was all make-believe. I wasn't happy. I was wretched. The truth was that I was fond of Hugo, but hated what I had made him do to me and what, once begun, he went on doing. Truly human beings are incomprehensibly unreasonable. Why didn't we stop handling each other? Neither of us really enjoyed it. He was too old, and too tired, and I——? I don't know what was the matter

with me. I only know that my first sudden sickening sense of disappointment was followed by four years of almost continual discomfort. Suffocation, that's the word, I think, that describes my feeling of stifling secrecy. But I dared not tell him. I had, on the contrary, an extraordinary notion that I must at all costs never let him suspect for a moment that I didn't long for his caresses. If this sounds unconvincing, I can only say that I am talking now of things below the surface, of what we both, not consciously, but subconsciously, and therefore truly felt. We managed, of course, to whip up quite often a fairly good imitation of ecstasy. We talked the usual nonsense, became adjusted to each other physically, after much painful fumbling, and acquired the inevitable habit of contact, but underneath all that we were, both of us, I think, wretched, and Hugo had a bad conscience and I loathed the secrecy, the lying, the careful, constant effort to keep the world from knowing what all the world already knew and talked about, and finally, in order to avoid talk, we gave up going about together, and so I lost all the fun of sharing in his activities. I didn't go any more to stay with him in Scotland or at Newmarket. He didn't feel comfortable if we dined too often at the same houses, and when we did meet in society he didn't talk to me. We had indeed little to say to each other at dinner

parties. And yet we clung to each other. He clung to me with a helpless feeling of remorse and I clung to him because he was old and I was sorry for him, and I can remember murmuring to him, with his old grey head on my breast and my arms round him, as if he were a child. A weak old man. I hated his weakness. I was furious with him for dragging out of me this nauseating sentiment of pity. It comes back to me now as I write, but something else comes back; a faint, ghostly sweetness, tasteless, bodiless as a perfume, colourless, something that faintly stirs my old heart and affects me as certain strains of grave music do. That is what I really have left of Hugo, and because no other man's memory can do that to me, I say that I must have loved him.

CHAPTER IV

FORGOTTEN things and things remembered, the distinction between the ephemeral and the permanent. What is the secret of selection at work in memory to preserve and destroy? Does the fact that I have forgotten things prove that they were unimportant, or is it simply that I am the world's best forgetter, or is it that the ego is a blind and hungry creature, a sort of sucking leech bent upon the destruction of everything it touches? Passionate events, moments of intense suffering or delight, all inner experiences and those phenomena of the outer world that I grabbed, seized, clung to with a desperate clutch and tried to make my own, it is these that have vanished. Those that escaped my clutch remain. The impersonal world is intact. I made holes in it as a rabbit does in a field, but it is still lovely, lovelier than ever, more impressive, more amazing. There's a golden light on it. The late sunlight that makes colour burn in a garden. I remember how the delphiniums in my garden burned blue, burning candles of the colour of eternity.

I feel, you see, that this means something, something that escapes me. When I state that

what survive best in my memory are first of all inanimate objects, and secondly the living things that lived a life different from my human one, I have a breathless sense of being on the brink of a discovery. Soft, silent flowers that fade so quickly, that I could crush in my hand, why should they have a vitality, and a reality denied to Maggie? A reedy lake where wild duck and plover and heron flew, why should I remember this so exquisitely when I have forgotten Hugo who took me there? The great brown breasts of the earth swelling under the scudding clouds of Scotland, a giant cart-horse with plumed fetlocks dragging a wagon into a farmyard, a ploughman passing along the skyline. Horses galloping, tossing their heads, flinging up their heels, hunters and race-horses running, oh, their beautiful easy power, ponies frisking in fields, bays, chestnuts, blacks and greys, beautifully moving across England, royal dumb creatures with proud heads and dainty feet and eloquent eyes. What did my hunters want to tell me when I visited them in their sweet-smelling boxes? Didn't they want to tell me that life was good in England, that the hay was sweet, and the oats savoury and the green fields good for galloping? Suppose I could have talked to them or to my dogs, could have asked my lovely mare, Roxana, my wise old setter Plato, or Bobs the Skye terrier or Dicksie the collie what in their opinion was the meaning of

life; I think if I had called them together from the stable yard or the hedges where they were rabbiting, if I could summon them now from their humble graves and get them round me in a circle and tell them what I and my friends did with life, they would be very sorry for me. It would seem to them a very noisy, disordered affair altogether, the world of men, and completely unreasonable. I can imagine them sitting with great dignity on their tails, looking at me with their mild, patient, submissive eyes. "Why can't you do things quietly, live quietly and die quietly? Why all this laughing and crying?" they seem to say to me.

It is the scene of our English life, of Maggie's as well as mine, that stands out now. It is England itself, the land itself, and the texture and shape and colour of the land, that seems to be important. Deep England, so rich, so luxurious and so crowded. I sank into it as into a delicious bog, got caught in it as if in a tangled thicket, found myself on my knees to it, constantly on my knees, on my knees in the garden, passionately digging, carefully weeding, on my knees in fields, in woods, on the banks of streams, on my knees in the stable yard or in the middle of a road, taking a stone out of a horse's hoof, or washing a dog's sore ear, or putting my tame crow's leg in splints, always on my knees before some humble creature. Doesn't this mean something?

Isn't it a natural attitude? It wasn't after all, the people who mattered in that hunting country.

I know of no people in the world so lapped in luxury, so spoiled, so pampered, so stupefied with every kind of pleasure as the English upper class. Smothered in beauty, gorged with good things, swathed in comfort, every sense tickled, stimulated and satisfied, truly it's a miracle that they have survived so long. There must be some saving, astringent, ultra-invigorating principle in the air and the soil of that island, to save the race from degeneracy, or perhaps it is simply because they live more like healthy animals than most well-to-do people. Hugo, by all the laws of nature, should have been a depraved and decadent old man. Buck should have been very nearly the same. Hugo had everything on God's earth that the heart of man could desire, Buck ran him a close second. Take a glance at the year's calendar of a man like Buck Dawson. Add up the pleasures. Take sport alone, fox-hunting and shooting, and fishing. If Scotland palled one popped over to Norway. Horse-racing and yacht-racing, Aintree, Newmarket, Epsom, Ascot, Goodwood, Cowes. You stepped into a dinghy in the Solent and were whisked to a Scotch moor. When the grouse were exhausted, there were pheasants. They lasted, with the partridges, till after Christmas, and if you wanted a change from birds or foxes, you went after tiger in India or

lions in Africa. All this time you were living high, even your roughing it was just a luxurious jaunt to provide a change, living at great ease in big solid houses, and were being exquisitely tended by armies of efficient servants and a series of fine, upstanding, warm-blooded, desirable women. You were perfectly brushed, washed, bedded and fed daily, and you were loved at night as often as you cared for it, whenever, that is, you were not too sleepy to be bothered. You drank incidentally a good deal of port and Burgundy, devoured large quantities of meat and game, prime ribs of beef, Southdown mutton, Cumberland hams and venison, fat ducklings, too, and plovers' eggs, and you smoked innumerable fragrant cigars and hit balls all over the place. This kept you fit. Whenever you weren't doing anything else you were hitting a ball, golf ball, tennis ball, polo ball. Hitting things accurately was one of your most exquisite sources of satisfaction. Another was breathing, and another staring. You enjoyed breathing in the air of your England and you showed your sense there, for it was delicious. You would stand in a stupor of bliss, though you would not so describe it, in a garden, or a stable yard, or a deep green field or on a moor fragrant with heather, and simply breathe and know as you filled your big, healthy lungs that it was good to be alive. And you would watch your lovely world. You'd

watch the woods flush from brown to red, then burst into frail, ravishing, golden green, and you'd watch the lilac and the may come out, and the buttercups rush dancing over the fields. You'd see the summer deepen and the days lengthen. You'd stare at the soft sky with your mouth open, stupidly, as if you were a stupid man, but you weren't too stupid to enjoy it, to love it, to sink into it, and that's where you scored over all other men on earth, for you ate your cake and had it, and went on eating it year after year till you collapsed into your comfortable grave in the decent, quiet churchyard at the gates of your domain.

Buck was a selfish man. In this he was not peculiar. His wasn't a special, but a class selfishness. He assumed that the universe was made for man, that the British were the chosen people, and that he had a right to the best of everything. His religion was Semitic. His social system was that of the Old Testament. The phrase "His ox and his ass and his wife" was altered by him to "His lands, his wife, his sons and his live stock." Though by profession a sailor, he wasn't a nomad. When he became a landsman, he dug his toes deep into the soil of his shire and prepared to fight for his possessions.

Buckhaven Park was a biggish place. Nice grounds, and an ugly pseudo-Gothic house full of early Victorian furniture and rubbishy relics

from outlying parts of the Empire. Maggie didn't do much to the house when she married. Neither she nor Buck cared about pretty things. Buck liked a certain "style" and plenty of comfort, good food, good wine, good beds. They put in some bathrooms, recovered a few chairs, cleared out a cartload of curios, got a new cook and began to live. Maggie adapted herself without fuss to her new position, had it out with the housekeeper and the superannuated butler who'd been left Buck by the old Lord, and in six months was, to all appearances, as completely English as any hard-riding, hard-living wife of any county magnate in the Midlands.

The set down in that county lived hard and lived well in the rapid, smooth, autocratic and ruthless way usual to English sporting people. Well-bred animals who knew how to get out of life the maximum of pleasure, just intelligent enough to find an almost perfect balance between sharp sensual delight and solid interest. The men, of course, chose, assembled the elements, worked out the scheme and set the pace. The women followed. If they didn't they were ignored. No languid or fragile creature could survive in that country. They had to be tough. If they could be tough and not look it, so much the better. Good looks were worth something, not as much as in some communities, but still, straight legs and a flat back, a deep bosom and a

neat waist, were acceptable to the male. He liked to run his eye over a handsome woman or a nice horse.

Buck's difference from the others was only one of degree. He was unique in that he went further than the others, could crowd more into a day or a year, and knew a little better than anyone how to get the quintessence of pleasure out of contrast. He mixed the primitive and the sophisticated with a sure touch, and the life he lived with Maggie was subtle and complicated for all it appeared so easy and slap-dash.

His house throbbed and hummed. Buck liked it full of people, and it usually was. He liked hacking home after a hard day to hounds through the harsh, bitter winter twilight to rooms full of lazy talk and drowsy laughter. Something essential was added to his fierce delight in the hunting field by the presence of lovely women at his dinner table. The day that wheeled suddenly to night as he hacked home with Maggie must provide to be complete, sudden warmth, candle-light, firelight, a dinner-table shimmering with silver and glass, champagne bubbling, port glowing, women stripped of their muddy armour, transformed from hard amazons into exotic creatures seductive and decorative. As I look back I see a vaguely exciting haze over it all, feel a drowsy tremor of excitement running from one to another through the lamplit rooms. This was

what Buck wanted, and this was what he provided for himself. All he asked of Maggie was that she should like it as much as he did, and manage to get her chores done without his noticing it. Her chores consisted in running the house, the garden and the village, the Mothers' meetings, the Women's Conservative Association and the district nurses. She was also expected to take an active interest in the hospital and the alms-house, the new Secondary School and the tenants of the half dozen farms belonging to the estate. These duties, however, must not interfere with her being in the saddle, or at any rate booted and spurred, by nine o'clock four days a week and prepared to welcome his passionate embrace every night, at whatever hour they went to bed. Buck was never tired, and he didn't expect her to be. It never occurred to him that after a hard day's hunting she might not want to play poker till two in the morning. He didn't seem to notice how small she looked in that big house, surrounded by all those big people, big horses, big dogs, and by all that big country. She must always be there, and always be ready to welcome with indifference the men who liked her and very cordially the women who didn't. And in return—well, in return he paid her the compliment of preferring her company to that of any of the handsome, well-groomed, high-coloured women with long necks, hard, clear-cut faces and

big bosoms whom he fancied, so definitely, as a type. Maggie wasn't his type. That became increasingly evident. She had no bosom, no chiselled profile, no colour, and in those days wasn't in the least smart. She was simply Maggie, a careless, untidy, passionate woman with a hoarse voice and dark circles under eyes that nevertheless brimmed with fun. She was emphatically happy, that was the point. Being with Buck kept her happy. I think quite definitely that her interest in him created in her a sort of psychic strength that took the place of physical vitality. It deceived him and kept her going at a pace that would have worn out almost any big, healthy woman.

Some people thought her a fool about Buck. They said she wasn't clever with him. I don't agree. Being clever didn't, of course, come into her scheme. If she'd been what they called clever she would have had a more peaceful life, but she wouldn't have got what she wanted. What she wanted was the impossible, and she knew this, I suppose. She must have known it, but, well, she wanted it, and she wanted nothing less, and for ten years she went on fighting for it, fighting Buck and the other women and Life and Fate and all the rest of it, and she gave Buck a run for his money such as few polygamous males are let in for.

• What she wanted was, quite simply, to keep

Buck exclusively to herself, and the surprising thing is that up to a point and for a period of ten years she did succeed. Her methods may not have been clever, but they were right. They were proved right repeatedly. She had vowed to herself that she would be the only woman in Buck's life, and I think she reasoned that if she could always be there, if there was enough of her to last out, enough passion and physical strength, then, because he loved her, she would win. It all came down to that in her mind—how much did he love her? She believed that he loved her enough. She staked everything on that, took enormous risks repeatedly on the strength of it and repeatedly won, because it was true.

I think she must have thrashed it out with him when they married. She was never good at pretending, and I think she told him plainly what her ideas were. He had, luckily, a sense of humour, and I think the way she handled his women friends tickled him. I've seen him on the verge of losing his temper suddenly burst out laughing.

I could see easily enough what her method was. There was nothing subtle about it. She simply took on one woman after another and "beat her to it." She had no intention of making it easy for Buck to deceive her. She meant to make it so difficult that it wouldn't seem to him worth while. If to accomplish this end, she had to do

outrageous things, well, she'd do them.

I've no theories about marriage. I think it's an impossibly difficult contract if it is taken seriously. When Maggie and Buck married they each lost something, of course. Maggie got an obstinate, selfish, autocratic English husband instead of a sailor lover, and Buck got a difficult, fiery, obstinate wife and a mother for his children instead of a wild little Yankee sweetheart. But I don't think that being married destroyed their love. Suppose they hadn't married? Would he have loved her longer? I don't think so. I think he'd have broken her heart quicker, that's all. I think being married to him was the only way she could keep him. All the same, it wasn't marriage but love that she took seriously. When she married her lover she didn't change. She remained his love long after she had become his wife, and I believe that Buck, strange as it may seem, thought of her that way, as his little loyal, unchangeable true love, and I believe that he counted on Maggie to hold him, as the skipper of a ship in a harbour where the tides and winds are dangerous counts on his anchor. Maggie's character was, you see, the solid bottom under Buck's life; her love, the anchor rope that held him. I emphasise this because of what happened in the end, because I watched that strong rope hold for ten years, under every kind of strain and friction, then at last begin to fray and wear thin.

I watched, in fact, with a sense of breathless suspense. It seemed to me terribly important that Maggie should hold out. I felt positively that all the world depended on it. Why do we all want so much to believe in true love? Why do we go on romancing if there's no such thing? I wasn't up to it, but I swear even now that Maggie was, that the end was all a ghastly mistake, that she and Buck loved each other even when they turned on each other in fury. Why the fury? Maggie hated that brute Reggie Brown, I think Buck hated Sonia, and I could swear he hated all the other women that caught him for a moment and got between him and Maggie.

I can see him now at his dinner-table leaning towards some siren in the unmistakable attitude of the powerfully attracted male, and I can see the nasty smile curling on his lips as he sized her up, and the cold little dangerous sparks in his eyes. She might get what she wanted, that lady, if she didn't want much. She would never get what Maggie had, and if she were foolish enough to fall in love with the man who was wholly a brute where she was concerned, then she was bound to get badly hurt.

Most of them didn't, of course. They were merely after a bit of fun. Maggie took them too seriously. She paid them the compliment of thinking they were like herself. It took her some

years to learn that a well-bred, decently set-up woman with a house and husband of her own could want to have an affair with a man for the sake of a diamond bangle or the social prestige attached to the conquest. Not that Buck gave away bangles. One of his kinks was that he didn't care for bought favours. But he was considered a fine feather in any lady's cap. Maggie didn't realise this. The type of amateur courtesan was new to her. She had no idea that Buck's amorous attention was considered in some quarters a good way of getting on socially. I didn't enlighten her. It didn't seem to me to be my business to explain to her the calculating cynicism of some of Buck's lady friends. We never discussed Buck, in any case.

The trouble was that nature intended him to sleep with a woman every night of his life, so what, one may ask, could he do about it? Deprived of women he got ill. The wonder is, not that he began to cast an eye on other women so soon, but that for the first ten years of their married life he went elsewhere so little. For Maggie simply could not be available all the time. In those ten years she bore him four sons, broke her collar-bone, smashed her pelvis, had scarlet fever in Vancouver and typhoid in Nigeria. At the best of times she'd no health to speak of. She had a weak chest, something not organically but nervously wrong with her heart,

and there wasn't enough red blood in her skinny body to keep her warm. She was, in other words, just what she should not have been, physically, for the man she had married, and the community she'd adopted. None of this troubled her. She admitted to none of it. She would come in from hunting white as death, but with her big merry eyes shining with the excitement of the exhausting day, and give twenty people tea. It was up to her never to be tired, and she never was. They were a hard lot, the Dawsons, and Buck was just like the rest of them. There was a great to-do about the place when a mare foaled, none at all when Maggie had a baby. Buck wasn't fond of children, but he wanted to have them, and he assumed Maggie would give him healthy ones, preferably boys. When she did, he showed no sign of gratification. She had merely done what was expected of her. And Maggie, of course, played up to him. Having babies was no easier for her than for any nervous woman with small bones, but if Buck were casual, well she would be more so. And, anyhow, it suited her perfectly to go through ugly things alone. It was very important if she were to hold Buck that he shouldn't be bothered by such things as squalling babies or medicine bottles.

Poor Maggie, when she got up after her confinement, she was sure to find some lady intruder on the place, so she'd hand the baby over to a

nurse, gird up her weary little loins and advance to the attack. Her attack was usually bull-headed. There were moments when I thought: "She's done for herself this time. Buck won't, he simply won't, stand for this." But he did. And if he didn't, if he bolted, she'd go after him and bring him back. She did this twice during those ten years. Once she followed him to Monte Carlo, and whisked him away from under the other woman's nose in the Sporting Club, once to Scotland. That was more difficult and took more nerve, took, as a matter of fact, a colossal nerve, involving as it did a disregard for all the conventions. Mona, the lady in question, was a monument of the conventions. To drive up uninvited to the door of Mona's Scotch castle in a storm at eleven o'clock at night and tell the men servants that you'd come to fetch your husband, was an effort that required either a great sense of humour or none at all. I think Maggie came nearer to defeat that night than at any other time till Sonia arrived on the scene. I think if she hadn't been ill that she perhaps wouldn't have done it, but I may be wrong. Anyhow, she was ill, had been in bed with 'flu and had got out of bed and taken the train with a temperature of 104. I know what her temperature was because I took it and tried to stop her going. Nothing could have stopped her. Nothing and no one but Buck.

He'd been in town. She had expected him

back on the Friday. But on Friday he wired that he was going to Mona's for the week-end. It was too late to stop him. He had sent the wire as he got on the train. So she jumped out of bed and went after him. There was a biggish party at Mona's. I heard about it afterwards from one of the women staying in the house. "She must have been mad, my dear. You never saw such an object, dripping wet and as white as a sheet. She looked hideous, positively, and she stood there in her macintosh making a puddle on the carpet and ordered Mona to hand Buck back to her. Mona was badly rattled. She thought Maggie had a revolver. She didn't know what to do. What can one do when a woman bursts into one's house with her eyes glaring and her teeth chattering and demands her husband? Hand him over? Exactly. Nothing else for it. I must say she looked a fool in the end."

"Who? Maggie?"

"No, Mona. She tried to be withering, you know, was awfully grand and sarcastic to begin with, but Maggie didn't seem to notice. All she said was: "Where is Buck? I want him." And Mona said: "He's in the billiard-room or somewhere." And Maggie said: "Send for him. He's coming back with me. I've got a cab waiting," and he went. But why didn't he loathe her for making a fool of him? It was her fainting, I s'pose. While they were fetching him she just

stood there shivering, and then when she saw him she suddenly crumpled up in a heap. I suppose he thought she was dead, had taken dope of some kind. Anyhow, everyone was badly scared. Mona tried, of course, to get her to stay the night when she came round, but she was mulish as she always is, and Buck went off with her just as he was. They spent the rest of the night in a hotel in Aberdeen. His man took his things to him in the morning. Mona had hysterics in her room afterwards. Algy said, and the men funnily enough all agreed that it was a dashed enterprising thing for Maggie to do. Algy said he'd take it as a great compliment if a woman cared enough about him to behave like a lunatic. Odd, wasn't it? You never can tell about men. You'd think Buck would have been furious. He was at first. His face wasn't pretty when he came into the hall and found her there. But when she fainted, well, there it is. It's Mona now who hates her. Lord! how Mona does hate her.

A number of women came to hate Maggie before that ten years was up, and although they made fun of her, a good many women were afraid of her. Having an affair with Buck wasn't a bed of roses. It came to be known as a very dangerous sport. Only those who liked trouble and rough going took him on. Some did, enough to keep Maggie busy. But none of them lasted, till Sonia came along. She appeared in 1910. David

was seven then. Bob, the youngest, was two.

Maggie had changed gradually. She was harder, more abrupt, laughed less, talked less. When she did talk she was caustic. Sometimes she used pretty strong language, and she was smarter. She wore better clothes, took care of her skin and used a lipstick. In fact, by 1911 she had a reputation for being one of the rudest and smartest women in the Midlands, and on the whole people liked her better that way, even the women. When her type closely resembled their own, they felt they understood her. The one thing that puzzled them was that she had no interest in men.

"She's so dashed concentrated," they'd say to me sometimes. "Doesn't she ever want a bit of a change? It can't be much fun, you know, being a nursery governess to a man like Buckhaven, and it's not as if she were much of a mother, is it? I don't s'pose those jolly kids of hers make much difference to her really."

They didn't. They made I believe more difference to me than to Maggie, those little boys. No one counted for her but Buck, and until two years after Sonia arrived on the scene she didn't look at any other man.

CHAPTER V

MAGGIE took most things lightly, but a few very hard. She concentrated on these. I knew that my affair with Hugo would be one of them, so I didn't tell her about it. She was indifferent to most people's conduct because she didn't care what became of them and took no interest in gossip, but in regard to her own behaviour and that of the people she loved, I had discovered that her head was furnished with a set of bold, bare, rigid ideas as awkward and solid as American kitchen chairs.

Her passion for Buck had had the effect of stiffening her character, narrowing her interests and simplifying her ideas. Two processes were going on in her, one on the surface, one inside. While she was adapting herself outwardly to the habits of her subtle English environment, she had been inwardly reverting to the outlook of the American log cabin.

She didn't, as I've said, talk to me about Buck or discuss the difficulties of her married life. When he was particularly selfish or so obviously inconsiderate that no one could miss it, her manner to me would become abrupt, cold and sometimes cross as if I were the offender. It was

her way of warning me off. She would give me a look that said plainly; "Don't dare comment on this, or show that you know what I'm up against."

But sometimes she would let drop something that referred to him indirectly. Once she burst out; "I don't like back stairs and I don't like liars and I hate cowards. You lie usually because you're scared. If you lie to anyone you're very fond of, it's finished. You can't go on loving anyone you lie to. I expect honesty from the people I care for, otherwise what is there to it? The thing is to know what you want and be prepared to stand the consequences. If you want an easy life and don't mind a mess—all right. That's that. I want something better, so do you, Lina."

On another occasion she said:

"They thought I was a loose woman. An American divorcée ought to be. They were all set to protect their husbands from my roving eye. Now that they see I don't rove but sit tight and look at no one but Buck, they're disconcerted. It's very stupid of them not to understand. It has nothing to do with morals. When you've got what you want, you don't go marauding, you shut yourself in, lock and bolt the door. Freedom? I don't want freedom. What on earth would I do with it?"

Though she said it had nothing to do with morals, it had, of course. Hers, like most people's,

were the result of her temperament, a defence erected by it, to meet the problems life presented. She had been given a rough, ready-made American set, taken from the Old rather than the New Testament, and she had made from them an emotional selection. Honesty was her essential quality and courage. Loving Buck with such absorption produced secondary prejudices, such as a loathing for loose promiscuous sexual contacts.

And she counted on me to be good—*i.e.*, strictly decent and rigidly moral, just as I counted on her. It was funny the way we watched each other and counted each on the other to stand up to life.

I knew that she had certain fixed notions about me. I knew she believed I was a strong character, had a chaste nature, and was capable of only the finest feeling, so I deceived her for a long time about Hugo, in fact, just as long as I could. This involved an enormous amount of careful subterfuge and a good deal of lying.

I had a house in a village five miles from Buckhaven Park, quite a good house with excellent stables. When I was down there I saw Maggie, as a rule, every day. We met out hunting; I dined with them often; I would often go home with her to tea. If she wanted an odd woman I'd move over to her for the week-end. She had never approved of my having a house in London, and when I took to going up to town

that second winter every Tuesday to Friday, she questioned me sharply.

"Why on earth do you go to town so much, Lina?"

"Oh, I don't know, to see plays—people—sharpen my wits."

"Rubbish! Who's the man?"

"There isn't one. I like meeting brainy people some times."

"I suppose you mean old Hugo?"

"Yes, among others."

"See much of him?"

"Quite a bit."

"Well, I think you're wasting your time. Brainy old men with grandchildren aren't your cup of tea at all. I want you to get married."

"Oh, for God's sake, Maggie, do drop that subject."

Later that winter, one sopping wet day when we were hacking home, she said suddenly:

"You're being talked about, Lina."

"Talked about! What do you mean?"

"You and your old friend."

"Oh, Lord!" I produced a laugh.

"It's all very well for you to laugh and say 'Oh, Lord'—I don't like it. I don't like what they say."

"Well, what do they say? And who are they, anyhow? Cats, I suppose."

"No, men. Buck says——"

"Well, I wish you'd tell Buck for me to mind his own business."

She was silent. We trotted on for a bit, then she said in a different tone:

"What happens to you is my business, Lina."

I didn't answer. I think I was in a panic by this time, for I remember feeling slightly sick and shivery. I remember how wet and dark it was along the bridle path under the trees, how the yellow road gleamed ahead of us through the rain. Maggie's voice comes back to me now through the soft rushing sound of the downpour:

"If you say it's all right, Lina, that's enough for me."

"It's quite all right, my dear."

I didn't see so much of her after that. I think I avoided her, I think when I was with her that I was very uncomfortable. What she had said about lying she had meant to apply to loyalty between a man and a woman, but it seemed to apply to us. Not that lying to her about Hugo made me care less for her, it made me, on the contrary, care less for him. I remember writing him a note about this time breaking the thing off, but I didn't send the note. I burned it, and a few weeks later I found that I was *enceinte*. That was in March, 1902.

The calendar on my writing-table; I remember staring at it, counting the days backward, counting and recounting. The objects on

that table and the chintz curtains over the leaded window-panes behind it are as clear to me as the block I'm now writing on. There were parrots on the chintz; there was a fine, large, fashionable photograph of my mother in a gold frame on the table, and a small faded one of my father. That was discoloured. There were fly specks on it. It wasn't a good likeness. It showed him in his old-fashioned business suit as belonging to a by-gone world, but he looked me square in the eyes, all the same, from that stained, shiny bit of old cardboard, and though I cannot remember what I felt during those days, I can recall the gaze of the tiny miniature eyes.

I didn't know what to do. I was quite ignorant about everything that had to do with such an experience as this. I could think of no one to go to for advice. Maggie, my mother, Hugo himself? I could tell none of them, and I could trust no one else. A doctor? But what doctor? I had no doctor of my own, had never needed one. I went so far as to look up the telephone number of my mother's London physician, but I didn't telephone him. How could I, Caroline Merryweather, go to that fashionable medical man and tell him my secret. It must remain a secret. But how could it, unless I got rid of it—but how get rid of it?

I would like to get all this exactly right. There is something in it that eludes me; tucked away in

that experience, is a fact about myself that seems to be important. It had to do with the essential me. It controlled, I believe, my actions. But how discover now at this distance the small, deep motive, at work in the mechanism of that frightened girl. That I was frightened is proved by my grotesque actions. I think I had a confused idea that if I mistreated my body violently enough I could get rid of the thing planted in me. I know I took a great deal of calomel and castor oil, rode to hounds like a mad woman, twice putting my horse at impossible obstacles, and when I came down with him, thought: "Now then, perhaps that's done it." Those falls were not, however, occasioned by any idea of doing away with myself. They were simply clumsy efforts to uproot the growth inside me; like the frantic antics I went through in my bathroom, bending and twisting and turning cart-wheels and somersaults and being violently sick at intervals into the wash-basin from exhaustion and too much medicine. And I did other things. It was useless. Nothing happened. The embryo was rooted in me, nothing I could do dislodged it, and in the end I had to tell Maggie.

Strange—the truth occurs to me now, as I write. I don't believe that I really wanted to get rid of it. I believe my efforts, frantic as they were, were only half-hearted. I believe my panic only partially controlled me. I think there was

something else to it, something that affected another, perhaps a deeper self, a kind of primitive pride, a sort of savage satisfaction, and I remember now that I was quite calm when I told Maggie, frightened of her, but not frightened any more of it, the thing that had happened and was going to involve such drastic consequences.

She took it even worse than I expected. I had asked her to come to see me. It was a Sunday in March, very stormy, sheets of rain slanting down and a high wind blowing. She drove herself over after luncheon. I took her upstairs to my bedroom, shut the door, stood with my back to it and told her.

“I’m going to have a baby.”

I catch a glimpse of myself now reflected in the cheval glass of that bedroom, with my back to the wall, head up in an attitude of defiance and a glare of white in my eyes.

Maggie was sitting by the fire facing me. She went so pale that I thought for a moment she was going to faint. One of my dogs was scratching on the door behind me. There always seem to have been dogs about, scratching on doors and windows in those days, and a gust of wind just then blew a cloud of smoke into the room. There was a lot of noise outside, a roaring noise of wind in the trees and a hissing rain slashing the window, and a tense tight stillness inside between us.

"For God's sake, Maggie, say something."

"Not you, Lina—not you——!" She whispered it, with her eyes shut, rolling her head against the back of the chair, and she repeated it several times: "Not you, Lina, not you!" I saw big drops squeeze from under her eyelids and roll down her cheeks and saw her mouth twist.

"Oh, God! Darling, don't take it like that. You must have known about Hugo. You did know—you guessed long ago."

But she shook her head, still with her eyes closed and the tears rolling down her thin face.

"I didn't know, Lina, how could I? I believed you; you said it was all right, and I believed you."

I lose the thread here. I can't remember all that I said or that she said. The scene opens and shuts—is shrouded at one moment, and clear the next, as a distant landscape seen from a train when the smoke of the engine blows across it and then clears again.

I know that she cried hard, as a woman does who's been dreadfully hurt. I can see her skinny shoulders shaking, her head bent in her hands. I think I knelt beside her, putting my arms round her, and tried to comfort her about myself. I believe I said: "After all, Maggie, why is it so dreadful? What is there to make such a fuss about? If I were married, you'd be pleased. Well, I couldn't marry Hugo because he'd

already got a wife. That's all!"

She got up after a while, went and stood with her back to me staring out of the window, blew her nose, wiped her eyes, and at last turned round, her face rigid, her mouth tight, her eyes angry.

"God! what swine men are. To think that that filthy old man——"

"It wasn't his fault."

"How do you mean it wasn't his fault?"

"None of it was. The baby's an accident, of course. What I mean is that he didn't want me that way—I did it all, I insisted."

"Why?"

That question of Maggie's rings out of the distance. Why? I had no real answer to give then, and I have none now, but I gave her one that would do.

"Because I loved him, you ought to know what that means."

"You expect me to believe that you wanted to give yourself body and soul to a silly old man who's been an awful rip in his day, but might be your grandfather?"

"I do."

In the end I almost convinced her, but when we got down to practical considerations she again grew suspicious and again got angry.

"What has he got to say about this?"

"I've not told him."

"What?" She yelled the word, and then rapped out again the other one. "Why?"

"I don't want him to know."

"Why not?"

"I can't explain, but I don't! This is my affair."

She looked at me strangely. Her mind was at work now.

"How far along are you?"

"Four months."

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I was afraid to. I knew you'd take it hard."

"Have you been to a doctor?"

"No."

"Have you told anyone else?"

"No."

"Your mother?"

"She's the very last person. She must never know anything about this."

"I agree. The question is, What do you want to do? There are doctors who get rid of babies. I can find one for you, I suppose. Is that what you want?"

"No, not now. I did at first. I was scared at first."

"You're going through with it?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's that! We'll have to work out something—a careful plan. Give me a few days to think it over. Give me some hot water to wash

my face. I never cry. If Buck sees I've been crying——”

“ You won't tell Buck?”

She gave me one of her direct looks. “ I'll tell no one, Lina, but you must tell Hugo.”

It was my turn now. “ Why?” I asked. “ Why should I?”

Her face went brutish then, I remember it distinctly. It thickened; such a very thin, mobile, sensitive face, it became for a second simply the face of a female thickened by animosity for the male.

“ He ought to know. He's no right to get off so easily.”

“ No, this is my affair entirely. I want it that way.”

Again her look sharpened. “ If you love each other so much I would have thought it was something to share between you.”

I had nothing to say to that. What could I say? How could I explain? She went on.

“ Either you must tell him and make him share the responsibility or go off, have your baby alone somewhere and never see him again.”

I hedged.

“ But what can he do about it? How can he help?”

“ I see what's the matter, Lina. You're afraid he'll not behave well. You think he'll disappoint you. My dear, no real man behaves well when

circumstances call for the exercise of a little imagination, not the kind of man you and I'd live with. Of course he'll disappoint you." She squared her jaw. "He must know all the same."

But it was, I think, simply the practical difficulty of keeping him in ignorance that made me tell Hugo in the end. I looked, I suppose, ghastly. I was sick a great deal; I loathed being touched; kisses suffocated me. And he did behave well on the whole, after all, as well as any man could in his position. Maggie had actually had, in the back of her American mind, an idea that he might get his grand old patient wife to divorce him so that he could marry me; she admitted as much long afterwards, but I wasn't such a fool, nor did I want to marry him. What I really wanted was to take a stand on my own, stop hiding and lying, have my baby openly somewhere, anywhere, and let people say what they damn well liked. I said to Maggie: "I'm a free woman. I'm not responsible to anyone or dependent on anyone. It's a question of my life and my child. Why can't I do what I like with them?"

I couldn't, of course. I was not free, not independent. There was my mother to be considered, and her Roberto, there was Hugo and his wife and his girls, and their husbands and his sons and his sons' wives and his grandchildren; and there was the Jockey Club and the Govern-

ment, his venerable dignified colleagues who were making peace with Kruger. If it became known that Miss Caroline Merryweather was about to become a mother, the world would want to know, and soon would know who the father was, and the Government would have to get rid of one of its most swagger and respected Ministers, and Kruger would have to talk to some less dignified representative of the Crown — and so on *ad infinitum*, to say nothing of the stampede that would occur in the Merryweather herd off there in California.

Hugo said: "This is dreadful, Carol. I've got you into the most awful mess, child. I feel the most awful cad. I've let you down badly, haven't I? I never shut my eyes all last night. What can we do about it? Would you like me to find a doctor? Yes, that's it, a doctor. Some of those chaps in Wigmore Street aren't so squeamish, you know, as they seem to be. They can be fixed. If Lady Buckhaven now could interview one—if we go at it in the right way—find the right one, make the chap realise the importance; if she'd explain—"

I cut him short. His fussing bored me. I could see that he dreaded being involved, even with doctors. I didn't blame him. He was helpless. He had no private life, couldn't move hand or foot without involving endless people, incredibly complicated consequences, and by that time

Maggie and I had thrashed out the whole question and settled on a plan. We had covered in our minds most of the map of Europe and North America, discarding first one place, then another, as a refuge. It appeared to be, when you got down to it, incredibly difficult to hide anywhere on the earth. A cast iron incognito or a change of identity was an almost impossible achievement. England and Scotland were dismissed first. They were too full of people one knew. Paris was nearly as bad. Italy was impracticable because of my mother, America because of my relations and newspaper reporters. One couldn't board a ship or land on American soil without being seen. Trains were safer than ships. One could be invisible in a train. The train I took must go far enough but not too far. I must keep to civilization, go where there were good doctors. We talked a lot about doctors.

"Is there no one, anywhere, Lina, whom you can trust and who would look after you?"

Suddenly I thought of the one person in the world who would help me in such an emergency. "Yes, my old nursery governess. She lives in Switzerland, near Montreux. She's a deaconess now of some sort, runs an orphanage or something. I've not seen her for years, but she was fond of me."

"There you are. I knew we'd hit on the right thing. The Swiss doctors are first class. Write

to her at once. Tell her the truth and ask her if she'll stand by you."

"She'll see me through, I think, but she won't like it. She'll hate it, even more than you. She's a very good woman, a very pious Christian. She taught me the Bible, takes it literally, all that about the Garden of Eden and the Serpent. She'll think I'm damned—actually I mean. She believes in Hell, in eternal fires burning; she's very innocent. Adultery and fornication are dreadful sins in her eyes. She will expect me to repent."

"Well, you've got to face that!"

And so I went to Sister Anna, as she was known in Montreux, the old Nanny Ann I had loved in California, and she took me in and all my childhood came rolling back over me when she opened her big arms in that small stiff varnished room of hers on the side of the mountain above the shining Lake of Geneva.

"Carolchen," she called me, and "du liebes Kind," and "Gott sei dank dass du mir geschrieben hast," she said, and I cried and cried against the thick black stuff of her dress. She hadn't changed much. She was heavier, her hair was grey, her skin coarser, but she was the same quiet childlike woman with the same serene forehead and the same light shining in her eyes. Perhaps it really was the light of Heaven. How do I know of what other celestial loveliness it was the

reflection? I only know that I recognised it when I saw it later, shining in a small boy's steady blue gaze, or appearing for an instant between the little Abbé's puckered eyelids.

I went to Switzerland in April. My child was due in August. Anna had taken a small chalet for me, a stone's throw from her orphanage across a meadow, and I seem to have gone deep asleep there, for four months, surrounded by those mountain meadows with their faint hollow distant cowbells, for I can remember almost nothing about those days except that they were very peaceful, and that though Anna talked to me of God, and ~~read~~ the Bible to me, just as I had known she would do, I could not rouse myself to feel afraid or repentant. I wonder now what she thought of it all. I am surprised now at the delicacy she showed me. She must have prayed for me a great deal, I think, but she didn't ask questions, and I didn't see really very much of her. She was busy all day, would come across to me in the evenings, and we would talk of the old days in California.

“Do you remember Kranz's candy store where we used to buy marzipan, Nanny Ann, and the German delicatessen where we got black bread and sausages? Do you remember how we trimmed the Christmas trees and hung wreaths of holly in all the windows of the house?”

There was a piano in the chalet and sometimes

she would play and we would sing the old nursery songs she had taught me, "O Tannenbaum" and "Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht," and "Kennst du das Land wo die Citronen blühn." Dear Sister Anna, her thin sweet voice comes back to me from my schoolroom on the shore of the Pacific and from the little chalet in that Swiss meadow. They seem to be the same place, for the notes of the piano are the same, and the songs are the same, and the mood is the same. Something childish, something lovely and innocent, remains mine always from this time. Did I miss something else, some truth, some stern beauty that she tried to make known to me? I was too drugged to suspect it, too sleepy to take in the words of the German Bible she had put by my bed. Life, the old magician, had done with me all it wanted to do for the moment and had handed me over to that strong power we call Mother Nature. It was she who had doped me and turned me for the time being into something very like a cow or a swine. Would a cow in calf, or a mare in foal, worry very much if one told it that Jesus Christ would surely come back one day to judge the quick and the dead? I had, I believe, no more moral sense during those days than any beast of the field, and almost no mind. I simply ate ravenously and slept profoundly and carried my heavy load up those mountain paths and lay down in the sweet grass among the little wild

flowers and slept again close to the earth and then went clumsily back again to my chalet to eat voraciously again.

"A very suitable place for me," I wrote Maggie. "This country is simply a big nursery. The whole place smells of talcum powder and flannel."

Nothing disturbed me. I think nothing could have disturbed me after awhile. Maggie had provided me with an alibi. She and Buck had gone on a trip to Norway, Lapland and the Baltic, and I had, so it was given out, gone with them. "We'll start together," she had said, "and in Paris you'll leave us; send any letters you must write to me, to post for you, letters to your mother for instance—only I'll have to tell Buck." So Buck and Maggie and Hugo knew where I was, but no one else until Tawaska turned up.

CHAPTER VI

IT seems odd now that I should have met Tawaska for the first time in Anna's small varnished parlour a month before my child was born, but it didn't seem, then, any more odd than anything else. I simply took him for granted and went to him as a dog would go to a man whom it recognised as the friend of dogs. It was that sort of recognition, a dumb, humble, instant response to the man's power, the sort of thing that makes a dog follow at your heels, obey your voice, wait for hours in a corner with his eyes fixed on you. That's what I felt about Tawaska.

I saw him from the porch of my chalet come up the path and stop at the door of Anna's institution. It was a very hot day. A heat haze was spread over the meadows. I had been drowsing. I sat up suddenly when I saw the big queer man rolling up the path. He was bareheaded. His head looked very white in the hot haze, as white as frost. The sun was blinding, spots and circles danced before my eyes. When I looked at the man he seemed to be surrounded by the darkish circle with pink edges that surrounds the sun in the blazing sky when you look straight at it.

There was a low wall enclosing the front yard

of the orphanage. I could see into this from my porch and see the front door of the building itself. Tawaska waited at the door in the wall for a minute. Then the house door opened, the children poured out, and a minute later Tawaska was in the yard, surrounded by the funny shouting laughing youngsters in their black aprons and stout boots. They crowded round him. They swarmed up his huge legs like monkeys. He had one on each shoulder when Anna appeared in the door. I couldn't see her face, but there was something very gay and friendly in the way she waved and hurried to meet him. They all seemed to be laughing. A baby was tossed into the air. Then another. Squeals and shrieks of delight came to me. Then all at once, without fuss, the big man extricated himself from the children and went into the house with Anna.

I didn't wait or hesitate. I went after him and walked in on them. Anna said placidly in German: "Carol, this is the Herr Doctor Tawaska from Finland," and I answered, "Yes, I know," and sat down and said nothing further.

But I hadn't known when I followed him into her room. I'm almost sure that I had not guessed who he was. I couldn't possibly have recognised in him the man I'd heard of in Peking, and of whom later Hugo had talked in London. No one had described him to me. Anna hadn't mentioned him. I'd no idea then that he was an

old friend of her family's, and that it was she who had sent him to my father for help nearly twenty years before when he was in the dried fruit business in California. I think that I simply acted on impulse at the sight of his huge figure, or, if you like, was dragged to him by the same magnetic force that makes me feel his presence now in this room.

We had nothing to say to each other that day or, for the matter of that, any day. Indeed, according to him, we never did have anything to say to each other. I have a letter from him written some years later, in which he states this: I may as well copy out a bit of it here. It is the nearest approach to a love letter that I ever had from him:

"I do not care for you in any human sense, or need you or want you, neither your love, nor care, nor sympathy, pity, admiration nor understanding. I have nothing to say to you, your difficulties do not appeal to me, your life does not interest me. I have no wish to tell you of mine, or share mine with you. I do not need you in any human relationship that I can imagine, but we belong to each other. It is an absolute relationship. It does not belong to this time and place. My feeling towards you bears no relation to anything you know, or can know or expect, hope or fear. I myself neither like it nor dislike it, I

accept it. I neither like you nor dislike you; I accept you, but not as a lover, or a companion or a friend, and not even as you have sometimes suggested, as a disciple. You have said our relationship was of that kind, but you did not make the effort, you were not sufficiently interested, and it is not true. Nothing that you could say or I could say could be true about us. But I will end this inconsistently and state that I believe our relationship has to do with 'somewhere else,' another place where there is no time and no death, no beginning and therefore no end."

I saw him every day for a week. He was staying in Montreux, and he came up by the funicular each afternoon. That was in July. I was within a month of my confinement. I would go out with him and puff and pant up the meadows, leaning on his big arm. Then we'd go back to the chalet for tea and he would sit on my verandah looking out over the Lake of Geneva while I made clothes for the baby.

A queerly domestic scene to share with a man who was, in the obvious sense, a complete stranger. If there was nothing more in it than appeared, then it remains inexplicable. Why should he have come every day?

We didn't talk much. Sometimes he did, softly in that frosty, lisping voice as if to himself, and

his words were like snowflakes falling through the hot afternoon.

"You never seem to be hot," I said, looking at his enormous bulk.

"I do not wish to be," he said.

"Can you do what you wish?"

"But certainly—in matters of that kind. It's only a question of breathing."

But he was cold in another way. There was something about him that chilled. He was without visible sign of emotion, was that it? Sitting beside me, he remained at a great distance. He might have been on top of the Jung Frau among the snows; he was as unapproachable—yet so near in another way, nearer than anyone. I felt him inside my head, but I couldn't have reached out and touched him, not then or ever. There seemed no point in it. He was like a snow man.

He talked of his work in the clinique a little.

"We are experimenting," he said. "We are finding out things about the mind. The mind is not important, it is not as important as people think. It is just possible that it has no existence. Perhaps we shall find in our experiments that it disappears."

One day he talked of physics. He said that physics since the time of Galileo had elaborated one technique of life to the utmost, but that certain phenomena, like certain corpuscles in light waves, could not be placed in space or time

accurately, because the apparatus of experiment interfered.

"Yes," he said softly, "yes, the amount of interference of the apparatus is exactly equal to the field of light waves which we circumscribe for the experiment, and then the experiment destroys itself. It is very mysterious, very beautiful."

I only half listened. It was all quite beyond me. I went on with my sewing. Queer that his soft, whispered words should come back to me, now, so distinctly. Perhaps he hypnotised me. It was a little like being in a trance when I was with him.

He seldom showed any interest in my affairs. Once he said: "You are more beautiful now than you've ever been before or ever will be again."

"How do you know? You've never seen me before."

"But yes, I have seen you—often. I saw you in London at a party, and I saw you in San Francisco. You were riding a pony and a big dog was following you. And there were other times, there are other ways. But you would not understand." He refused to say any more, and I left it at that. I don't know why. I accepted what he said.

Once he asked me what I would call my child.

"If he's a boy," I said, "I shall call him John Merryweather."

"And what will you do with him? Take him back to England or America?"

"I don't know. I haven't decided."

"If he lives, you must let Anna look after him, then give him to me. I remember your father, John Merryweather. It would be interesting to see—"

I remember the queer dream feeling that came over me when he said this, and I recall saying to him that it was all like a strange dream, the distant mountains floating in the air, the lake, the faint cowbells, faint voices calling; a boy's voice yodeling and his being there, talking of my father and my son. "You and Anna," I said, "are like dream people, beings from another unreal world."

"Perhaps you have got it just wrong," he said. "Perhaps all the others are the dream people, even the father of your child—perhaps he is not a real man."

Anna didn't remark on his coming every day to see me. She didn't seem to think it odd. She said when I asked her that she knew very little about his life. He would come to see her every few years. He liked coming to see the children, all children loved him, then he would disappear. He had friends in Montreux and Lausanne among doctors and scientists. He was doing some special research work with a nerve doctor in Montreux, she said; he was interested in

nervous disorders, hallucinations, premonitions, and multiple personality. She thought he was a good man, but knew he was not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes she wondered if he were not in danger of giving his soul over to the powers of darkness. "Out of curiosity," she added, "he wants knowledge," she said, "at any cost. He is always experimenting, trying this occult school, then that. He is a student of hidden things, and sometimes I think of forbidden things, but I believe he is a good man, that he is disciplining his soul and that he believes in the Holy Life."

"He is not a happy man, Anna, as you are a happy woman."

"No, he has not found peace."

"Perhaps it is not peace that he wants."

"Perhaps not," she said.

He went away three weeks before the baby arrived.

"I leave to-morrow," he said. His round, shaved head and great shoulders were between me and the sun. I couldn't see his expression, but I could see the distant panorama of lake and mountains spreading behind him.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"I do not know."

"When will you be back?"

"I do not know that either."

"Shall I write to you—when it's over?"

"I have no address," he said.

"But I shall want to know where to find you."

"I will come to see Anna some time," he said. "She will tell me about the child." His voice was queer, soft, distant. "I have never wanted a child of my own or a woman, but I will take care of your boy if you will. Perhaps—that is the point. There is something. I do not know what it is, but you have been a nuisance to me for a long time. You always will be. You cannot help yourself and I cannot do anything. You are a very stupid woman. You will go back to England, to that dream man or another. Whatever happens, you'll do that." And off he went lumbering down the steps, chuckling softly to himself, and I hated him, wildly at that moment.

I have already told about the baby business, and how everything went wrong with my boy John Merryweather and how Maggie came from England. She and Buck were home by then. It was Anna who sent for her. I was a long time struggling over John, three days I think, time enough for her to get to me, anyhow. Anna buried the little body of my boy, who came by mistake feet first into the world, after fighting so hard, and was choked by his own mother, and so died while she was asleep. But I forgot to say that I tried to end my own life, too, afterwards, when I was convalescent, simply because I think I didn't know what else to do with it, didn't want

to go back again, begin again, hadn't the energy to meet Hugo again, or break with him, had altogether a great distaste for everything. But I didn't take enough of the drug, and the Swiss doctors are the best in the world, apparently. They couldn't save John, who wanted to live, but they saved me, in spite of myself, when I wanted to die and be done with it all and lie in a big grave next his small one. I would have been comfortable there I think, and perhaps he would have liked it, too. Instead I went back to Hugo, with whom I wasn't really comfortable, not straight back, for he was in Scotland when I got to England, and I didn't go there any more, nor immediately back into his gentle old arms when he came to town in December. But in the end I did sink again on to his old chest and say I was glad to be there, and I almost believed him when he said that the little chap whom neither of us had ever seen would bind us together always.

* * * * *

The dream feeling, the sense of unreality followed me back to England and remained with me for a long time. I remember that my very ordinary red brick hunting box looked strange when I got back to it, as if I'd never seen it before. The mahogany furniture in my bedroom seemed unfamiliar, the garden with its withering chrysanthemums curiously ugly. I remember

hurrying out to the stables, going with increasing nervousness into first one box, then another, for reassurance, for relief from that awful sense of ghostliness, and I remember not finding relief. Even my horses seemed strange to me. Their big, dumb, mournful eyes made me wonder and shiver. Everything made me wonder. Everything frightened me. Nerves, that was it, I suppose.

"You've got nerves, Lina darling," Maggie said. "You'll be all right when you've had a few weeks hunting. Why not shut up your house and come and stay with us?"

She was very gentle with me. That, too, made me wonder—and her invitation, what did it mean? Didn't it mean that she thought I must be protected? She said no one on earth suspected my secret. She declared emphatically, too emphatically, that nothing had leaked out. She said: "You imagine things, Lina, because you're not well. People are just the same, no one's in the least different."

Possibly I did imagine slights, snubs, suspicious glances and blank stares, to begin with, when there were none. Possibly it was my own self-consciousness that produced the very thing I'd imagined, or perhaps it was simply that I was too tired to be careful with Hugo, and that he was so sorry for me that he let me be careless. In any case, we were careless.

It was a kind of chivalry on his part that made him go about with me again in public as he had done in the days of my innocence. I think it was his way of trying to make up to me for the harm he'd done. Anyhow, whether because we were indifferent now to the consequences, or simply bored at being shut up alone, or just because he wanted to cheer me up, we took to lunching and dining together in restaurants. I went with him to most race meetings, attended the debates in the House and had tea with him there afterwards, and so we succeeded in making our liaison public, just at the time when there was no sense in doing so, because the pleasure we had in being together was all but gone.

I don't think that anyone ever definitely knew for a fact that I had had a child by Hugo. I think they merely put two and two together, and suspected the truth and talked a good deal because Hugo and I were, I suppose, a conspicuous couple. Maggie did a great deal towards pulling the wool over their eyes. She and Buck both lied, I know, unwaveringly, about the Norwegian trip; still, a good many people dropped me. Not Maggie's own lot, she saw to it that they didn't, but people I'd met in London, what one might call "the best houses." I wasn't asked to dine in houses where I had once been very glad to be welcome. I minded this, I can't deny that I minded it. There was some-

thing about the particular women who dropped me that I much admired; the very thing perhaps that made them drop me. They might be dull and stiff, they had, nevertheless, a talent for life that I envied. They played one might say, a very good game — of life, just as some men play a beautiful game of golf. And they only enjoyed playing with other scratch players. No one who foozled or sliced, or missed an easy putt, or lost his temper or nerve, was eligible to their club. They were sticklers for style, a natural style, that wasn't natural at all really, but was the result of long, careful training begun in the nursery. Hugo was one of their stars — a life and a foundation member, born to the game, a subtle and modest performer, who slouched round the course of life with a long, loose, easy stride, and never made a mistake. And they had welcomed me when he introduced me to them, if not warmly, at any rate, with a friendly curiosity, and for a time my eccentricities had amused them. But now it was as if they sniffed danger. I no longer amused them. I was no longer "that queer, handsome girl old Hugo's so mad about," but "that awful American who's making such a fool of herself about poor old Hugo," and so they dropped me, and others who weren't quite so fastidious took me up, and in the place of women who'd been friendly, I found men who eyed me with a new interest.

The sudden appearance on the scene of a number of would-be lovers was one of the queer things about that winter. Men bobbed up in the most unlikely quarters, men I'd known, but who'd never noticed me before. I thought this very odd. In my morbid state it disturbed and humiliated me. I suppose it was natural enough, I suppose, that a love affair with a prominent man and a certain amount of scandal will always cast glamour of a sort over a woman, in some men's eyes. I didn't think of this. I felt that they suspected my tragic secret, that something physical in me betrayed it and that they were on my trail like a pack of hounds after a wounded fox.

It was Buck's behaviour that made me feel this. He had been exceptionally nice since my return, quite unusually friendly and I had been grateful, and then suddenly one Sunday afternoon in January, he'd asked me to walk down to the farm to see some new pigs he'd got; suddenly without warning between two sheltering hayricks he stopped, turned, made a lunge at me, grabbed me round the shoulders and clamped his wet mouth on mine.

There was a scuffle and a struggle. I wrenched myself free and hit him in the face with my fist as hard as I could, bruising my knuckles against his teeth.

“Idiot!” I can see him now, staggering out

of the hay and standing there with his head hanging forward and down, his arms akimbo in the attitude of a boxer, his face purple, his eyes dangerous under savage brows, his lip bleeding. He was not a pretty sight, and so we stood glaring at each other in that messy farmyard, near a pigsty, between the haystacks. And suddenly, luckily, I think, I went off into a wild fit of laughter.

“What the devil are you laughing at?”

“You! You look so funny, you look so screamingly funny, your mouth’s bleeding, and you’ve got straw in your hair, and there are pigs grunting. It’s just like that awful picnic in the Philippines.”

“Picnic! Philippines! What on earth are you talking about?”

He hated being laughed at, hated it so much that he forgot, in a moment, that he had wanted to kiss me, became all at once simply self-conscious and embarrassed, as if he’d been discovered by me in some unbecoming state of undress.

It was odd, that episode. We went through the scenes of a whole novelette in the next ten minutes, and the different chapters are marked for me by the landmarks on our walk back to the house. At first he was ashamed and discomfited. He began sheepishly to wipe the blood from his mouth and pull the wisps of straw out of his hair.

"I say, Caroline, stop, can't you? I want to explain. I can't while you're laughing."

When he had smoothed his hair, however, and picked up his hat, he resumed his lost dignity, became pompous. "I'm sorry about this," he said, "I can't think what came over me. You know I do like you most awfully."

"Come along," I said, "let's get back. If you think it necessary to explain, then don't do it that way. But it's not necessary."

We were out in the open farmyard now. I walked through a yellow puddle to the gate. He opened it. The gesture seemed to restore his confidence still further.

"I do really admire you no end," he said. "You've grown, you know, damned attractive lately. I simply couldn't help myself just now," and he leered at me as I passed through the gate. I saw red.

"They breed pretty good cads in your country," I said, stalking out into the road.

He banged the gate behind me and came after me snorting like a bull. "By God, you little devil!" But we were in the road now and overlooked by the house and he couldn't go for me again. I strode on very fast with him snorting behind me till we got into the walled garden. There he had me again hidden from view, so he grabbed my arm and twisted me round. I may have looked frightened, I may even have looked

interested, for he did interest me horribly. In any case, he mistook my expression, for he stared a moment, then said in the smooth voice of the complete humbug: "I couldn't help myself because I've fallen in love with you."

"You're a dreadful liar, Buck, and you've still got a bit of straw behind your left ear."

"Damnation! Can't you be serious?"

"No, I can't, and it's lucky for you I don't want to be."

"But why?" he asked. "Why?" We'd crossed the kitchen garden and were in the drive now that led to the side door.

"Because of Maggie, you fool!"

That silenced him for a moment. We did a couple of hundred yards up the drive without speaking. When we were quite close to the house, he asked, surprisingly:

"Well, what have I done after all? I only wanted to kiss you. It's a compliment. Dash it all, most women would be pleased."

"Would they?"

"They would."

"Well, I'm not—but if you think I shall let this make any difference—" I stopped, hesitated, felt I'd blundered.

"Make a difference—how?"

"To me—to Maggie—good God! Buck, can't you understand that Maggie's the best friend I have in the world, that all this is incredibly

insulting to her—that if she thought——”

But I saw in his face that he'd no interest whatever in my feeling for Maggie, didn't in the least believe in a friendship between two women, didn't think such a thing of any consequence, and his next words proved it.

“It's you who are the fool,” he said. “Do you suppose my kissing you is going to make any difference to Maggie. Are you going to tell her then, or do you expect me to?”

He made me sick. He seemed to me, not only beastly, but unspeakably stupid. How on earth explain to such a man? I gave it up. But my disgust and uneasiness must have been evident, for by the time we reached the side door he had evidently realised that for some inexplicable reason he really didn't attract me, and so he assumed as he let me in, an expression of cynical amusement. And what he managed to convey to me as he helped me off with my macintosh was: “You're a very crude young woman, and you have a quite ridiculous sense of your own importance, both to me and to Maggie. If I said the word, Maggie'd drop you just like that—so it's you who'd better to careful.”

She was sitting with Jock and one or two other men in the hall when we came in. David was due in a month, and she looked, I remember, very defenceless as she moved heavily across to the tea-table with the gait common to all women

eight months pregnant.

"Did you have a nice walk?"

"Fine."

"Do you approve of the pigs, Lina?"

"No, Caroline didn't think much of them."

"You've not been scrapping, have you, you two?"

"Scraping, darling?"

"You look as if you'd had a row."

I met her eyes across the tea-table. Their gaze was enchantingly sweet and perfectly confident. But Buck moved over to her while she questioned me and laid an arm across her thin shoulders.

"We did have a few words," he said, "Caroline and I—didn't we, Caroline?" I looked up to see his eyes narrowed at me over the top of her head; dangerous little sparks were glinting in them. "Got a bit of a temper, has our Caroline," he said. "But we're the best of friends again, aren't we?"

"Of course."

David was born a month later, February 10th, 1903, was his birthday. My mother died the following summer. I went to California to settle up her affairs in September, and Hugo's wife died of cancer in the beginning of the year of 1904. I had seen little of Hugo during the last months of her life. We neither of us felt comfortable together while she lay up there in the North, dying in that great room of hers, with the wild

rolling country she loved spreading away beneath her high windows to the sea. But when it was all over and she'd been buried with the solemnity befitting her and all London had been to the memorial service in the Abbey, he came to me and said, in his gentle, shy way, that he hoped I would marry him, after a decent interval, say, in a year's time. He'd be sixty-three, he said, but he hoped that what he lacked in some ways he could make up to me in others. There was still a lot of life left in him yet, and then, with one of his rare lovely smiles that made him always seem such a darling, he added: "With you beside me, Carol, I'll be good for another ten years or so; you'll keep me young, you know."

He did it beautifully. There wasn't a trace or a sign of any sense of obligation. He made it seem as if I'd be conferring on him the most precious of benefits. He did it indeed, so charmingly, that I think he must really have felt at the time that what he said was true. I believe even now that he did want me to share what was left of his life, just because he was fond of me, and I am, and always have been, grateful to him. It is one of the few solid things I have left from that time, but I know, of course, that I did him a greater service in refusing than I had ever done in giving myself to him. What it came down to was that, though he didn't admit it, he was under an obligation to me to marry me, and I was

under one to him to do nothing of the sort. If he had something to make up to me, I had, I felt something equally important to make up to him. We had played a mean trick each on the other. He wanted to put that right by a public acknowledgment of our relationship. I wanted to put it right by ending it. But it wasn't easy to end it. He was completely bewildered when I refused to marry him. He couldn't understand and couldn't accept my refusal. He came back and back to it, took to worrying inordinately, began to argue. Each time he came to see me he would approach a new aspect of the question, until at last I saw that, fond of me as he was, and all the more because he was fond, he was really vastly concerned with what the world would say if we didn't marry.

It was the chivalrous instinct again. He couldn't bear to have his friends say he had made use of me and then dropped me. He found it intolerable that I should be known as his cast-off girl friend. He found the picture of himself, as the seducer and clandestine lover of a girl whom he did not care to make his wife, equally intolerable. He vastly preferred a full dress family row, a series of sharp struggles with sons and daughters and a quick storm in society. He could cope with that. He was, after all, someone. His sons and his sons' wives, his daughters and their husbands would come to heel. He could,

he said, guarantee their behaviour, and they would, he knew, grow fond of me. As for society—he lifted one eyebrow, tugged at his moustache and smiled faintly, not the lovely smile he showed me when he was about to do something very kind; this had a glint of steel in it, as Buck Dawson's had sometimes. But it was subtler and wiser, just as he was subtler and wiser and deeper than Buck, and more sure of himself. Dear Hugo—he was a sweet man and as great a worldling in his way as the little Abbé, and I remember that slight supercilious smile of his as the sign of a very great worldly power. It was, I knew, a promise of power to me, and I felt as I looked at his smooth, sensitive, grey face tinged with that faint expression of scorn, that I'd be safe on my throne beside Hugo, safe and privileged and surrounded, safer than many a crowned head and seated on a throne quite as solid. All I had to do was acquiesce. I couldn't do it.

I proposed to Jock on a day of sudden thaw, on one of those soft devastating false days of late winter when everything begins to melt suddenly, and all the world seems to be bursting and rushing toward spring, the kind of day that fills me with a melancholy restlessness, the kind of day I hate, in fact, more than almost any. I'd gone over to Moffat's to try a horse he'd just got from Ireland. We were standing in the mud under the

oak tree watching one of the grooms cantering round the field, and I spoke.

"What would you say to our getting married, Jock?"

I remember how still he went, suddenly. The alert stillness of a dog pointing, that was it. Every muscle and every nerve in him went taut. I was watching him, and I noticed how queer and tense he had become, but I couldn't, of course, know what was going on in him. I couldn't possibly have imagined that he was thinking: "What's the game? What's at the bottom of this?" I couldn't have guessed how he instantly scented danger and glimpsed opportunity, was at once both alarmed and dazzled to a degree that paralysed him. I had never known anyone in the least like him, and so had no idea that when, after a moment, he turned to me, he had sized up the situation to his own satisfaction, answered his own question and decided that it was worth risking. His manner betrayed none of his calculations. His bright little eyes didn't convey their contempt for me, or their hunger for what I could bring him. They merely looked excited, and his voice when he spoke carried to my ear nothing more definite than a note of that same excitement, and I mistook its quality. I thought him moved, as other men had appeared to be of late, and I thought: "I must tell him at once--just how things are, just what sort of arrange-

ment I'm suggesting, just how much and how little I can offer," and so I spoke again hurriedly, and I hear the words now, and they seem to me the words of a mad woman.

"Don't misunderstand, Jock, I don't love you or expect you to love me. It's nothing of that sort. I love someone else, I have for years, but I can't marry him, and, well—I thought as we had lots in common that you might like a sort of friendly arrangement."

Perhaps I was not quite sane. It's possible, I suppose, that I was temporarily a little off my head. It certainly doesn't seem now to have been a rational proceeding, confessing, I mean, to that strange, beautiful horse coper who smelt of ammonia and oats and mud and horse sweat, that I was not a virgin. Indeed it all swims in a crazy haze, is crazy with indeed the special craziness of a nightmare, and I hear Maggie's voice and Hugo's voice and Buck's voice, as voices in a dream, that call to me in protest, and are choked off suddenly.

"What's it all about, Lina, out with it; has your old Hugo let you down?"

"Not at all. He's quite ready to make an honest woman of me."

"Don't talk like that. I hate to hear you talk like that, and don't lie to me. Is he tired of you?"

"No."

"He does really want to marry you?"

"Yes."

"And you? What of this great love of yours?"

"It's gone stale. I like someone else now."

"You're lying, Lina. I told you not to lie to me. It's not necessary, for one thing, and not successful for another. Let's get this right. You know what everyone's saying."

"Yes, I know."

"You don't care?"

"Yes, I care, but I suppose I care more for my own good opinion than for other people's."

"You've refused to do it because it's so obviously to your own interest—is that it?"

"Possibly—partly—I don't know. I simply can't do it, that's all. Anyhow, I'm in love with Jock now, and I'm going to marry him."

"You're not, you're lying. Why are you lying to me? Why, Lina—why?"

That awful boring word. I hear her voice calling it, a lost little voice calling in a cave full of echoes. Why! Why! What's it all about, Lina? Why don't we do what we want to do? Why do we do what we do, do—do, do, do, do? Why?—why?

And I said to Hugo: "You know Jock Bailey?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Oh yes, you do. You've met him several times. He's a partner of Moffat's, the horse dealers."

"What's he look like?"

"Very tall, very small head, little eyes that go bright green and red like a ferret's."

"Oh yes, I remember the fella. He rode the winner in the Grand National; when was it now? Something tricky about it—some unpleasantness. We didn't quite like it or like him."

"Well, I'm sorry for that because I'm going to marry him."

"Marry that chap?"

"Yes."

"You like him?"

"Yes."

"Better than me?"

"Yes, Hugo." God forgive me that lie, anyway, for it hurt. I saw him wince, saw his old face go greyer, sag a little, a curious languor covered it. Where had I seen just that languor before? I know now, in my childhood, in California, on my father's face that day when we stood watching the fog roll in and my mother made a scene.

But Hugo must have thought it over intelligently afterwards, for he went to Maggie, and he went to see Buck, and Buck said: "Old Hugo's in no end of a fuss. He says you're goin' to marry Jock Bailey just to get out of marrying him."

"Well, I call that very subtle of him."

And Maggie said: "Just what do you mean by that, Lina?" and I answered:

"I've got to marry someone, haven't I? If for no other reason, just to stop Hugo fussing. It's my being stranded, that's what he can't stick at any price, leaving me a lone woman, rather déclassée, rather notorious. You know as well as I do, that though half the world's dropped me the other half's been waiting to see what Hugo would do. If he doesn't marry me, they'll drop me, too. Hugo knows that, and it worries the poor old darling to death. I think it's very sweet of him. I'm awfully sorry, and, well, I'm going to get married and end all the fuss."

I don't, of course, remember this speech word for word, but that was the gist of what I said to Buck and Maggie together.

And then Buck asked:

"But why do you pick Jock Bailey?"

"I like him, he's a friend of yours, isn't he?"

"Hum—yes. He's a good enough fella in some ways, but he's not quite right, all the same. And—well, I wouldn't want my sister—why can't you take some decent chap with a place of his own and a stake in the country?"

"Someone like yourself?"

"Just so. Someone like me. It's safer. You may not think so, but it is."

I can see him now as he said this, standing in front of his study fire in his pink coat, his hands under his coat tails, his heavy jaw dug into his collar and his small blue eyes fixed unswervingly

on my face. Not a sign of self-consciousness, not by a flicker of an eyelid did he betray any memory of our scene in the farmyard, yet he must have known that I knew how he had let Maggie down already with a dozen women and would try it on with any and every friend of hers just as he had with me. It wasn't Buck Dawson who was likely to prevent my marrying Jock Bailey, but it is queer to think now of how I had wanted Buck to take me in those powerful arms of his, in 1898, in Manilla, and of how I had hit him in the face when he tried to do just that thing six years later, and I am sure now, because of the sense of sweetness that comes floating back to me, to stir my heart, that I was very fond of Hugo when I left him.

* * * * *

A horrid thing has happened. Joanna caught me last night dancing all by myself to a gramophone.

I bought the gramophone the other day, and some records, and I turned it on last night and sat listening, and presently a very queer thing happened. I began to feel amorous, just like the old Admiral thirty years ago in Manilla, only he had me then whereas I had no one. There wasn't anyone alive anywhere on whom my thoughts could alight as an object of sentimental interest. Every possible man was dead and gone. Whom could I summon to mind? To whom could I offer,

in imagination, the pleasure of this odd intoxication? I could think of no one, remember no one. There wasn't a ghost to whom I could attribute this emotion. But the emotion was in me, all the same. It had come out of the musical box. It had jumped like a genie from the soundbox into my diaphragm and was pulsing in me aimlessly. A derelict ship with a rotting hull, abandoned of life, drifting out to sea with a wireless blaring out jazz from its empty cabin to the waste of water, there I was with that rusty old sex machine beginning to buzz and creak inside me, my toes, knees, shoulders, impelled to certain movements, and my thoughts flying out in all directions in futile search of someone to be sentimental about. And then Joanna caught me at it. I heard a great gulp of a laugh smothered behind me; stopped, turned, saw her in the doorway, blushed hot, shouted at her: "What do you want?" and choked off the thing that was playing the Shivery River. It gave a squeak and was still; and love, love! do you hear that, Tawaska, funny, isn't it? laugh, let's laugh, Eros, God of Love, vanished up this village main street, left me in crimson confusion, but luckily shrouded by shadow, facing Eliza Perkins's outraged cook.

Interesting, don't you think so? Very illuminating. You agree. I know. It explains Hugo, Jock, Henry, Carlos and Philippe, not to mention the first of all, that long-vanished naval

officer, Buck Dawson. But it explains more than love affairs, as they are called, for I see now, I begin to get a glimpse of other groups, clusters of sensation like this sex one. Certain sounds marked by certain rhythms say to my mind: "You are in love." It's a lie, but I believe the lie. Certain other arrangements of colour and mass, of light and shade, of smell and texture, say to me "You are gloomy" or "You are sad" or "You are gay." Others say "You are compassionate" or "You are cruel." Others again tell me I'm a martyr, much misunderstood, others that I'm a woman of great power and character. It is all lies, but I believe them. I've always believed them.

Humbug. Everything that happened to me from 1899 to 1910 was humbug. Life tricking me, lying to me, pushing and tickling and pinching me, getting responses of pain and pleasure out of me. Like a game of blind man's buff between a woman and a crowd of hobgoblins. The sly old magician blindfolded me, then set the goblins on me, mischievous, vicious, lascivious little brats, teasing creatures. They would pretend to caress, then pinched suddenly and were gone before I could grapple with them. They sounded friendly, ardent and eager, spoke with lovers' voices, said: "Come, come this way, this way." Then when I stumbled towards the voice, holding out blind arms, nothing, emptiness, silence, followed by an

eerie squeal of distant laughter. Such was my love life. But I never learned by experience, was always fooled again.

“I love you, Caroline, God, how I love you!”

“I love you, Hugo, Jock, Henry, Carlos, Philippe. I shall always love you. I’ve never loved anyone like this before, Hugo, Henry, Carlos, Philippe.”

It’s like a talking film with two actors, a man and a woman. Their figures are not very distinct. The woman’s myself. The man changes imperceptibly from Hugo to Henry, to Carlos, to Philippe, but he has the same voice and he says the same things, and since he has no face I can only tell because his name changes that he isn’t the same man.

“You are mine now, Caroline, mine for ever.”

“Yes, Hugo, Henry, Carlos, Philippe.”

What is this man? Who is he? No one. He has no identity. He’s just an arrangement of bone, flesh, muscle and hair that is called a lover. He isn’t all men. He is a special kind of man. He may have black hair or brown or red, but he must have some one thing that I cannot define, and that acts like a magnet. It’s hidden in him. I don’t see it with my eyes. I recognise it in some other way, with my solar plexus, maybe. There’s something like a gyroscope there, or used to be, a very sensitive little machine that steers me. If the man had the thing in him that touched

the tiny spring, off I went with him like a somnambulist.

But what was the thing? How do I know? I don't even know why the sound of a cock crowing fills me with a short, sharp, exquisite delight, or why certain brilliant aspects of a windy sky make me want to shoot myself.

I felt like smashing the gramophone last night after Joanna caught me. I didn't. I only shoved it out of sight. But why have I done that? The cook, appearing in the doorway with her big pale shocked face, made me. An arrangement of cold mass, icy weight, a combination of intimidating, inimical things out of a peasant's Sweden, a bunch of prejudices from the other side of the North Sea, these were too much for me, destroyed my flickering flame of old, primitive joy, produced shame and anger. I felt ridiculous, saw myself as an insanely lonely old woman, when a moment before I had known because the gramophone told me so that I was young and in love. Which was right, Joanna or the gramophone? All the world would say that my cook was right, but you, Tawaska, what would you say? I wonder. It was annoying to be caught like that. More than annoying, intensely disagreeable. I suppose Joanna will write Miss Elizabeth all about it. Probably she's writing the letter now with her red arms akimbo on the kitchen table. She's describing how she found the old lady who's

rented the house, dancing by herself to the gramophone on the side porch. "There she was, Miss, jigging on her old feet, behind the Virginia creeper. She'd pushed the chairs back, taken down the hammock, and there she was, in the dark, only a little bit of moonlight coming through the leaves, and the light from the street lamp slanting over the grass, and she was dancing on the square bit of matting, one of those shaky jigs that make you think of savages in Africa, all by herself with her arms up and her black skirts swaying, and she's getting on for sixty, Miss Elizabeth, and I guess she's crazy."

No, not crazy, Joanna. Not half so interesting, very ordinary, really, only a fool. Only a ridiculous old woman, whose tough carcase reacts just as it used to do to certain arrangements of sound, whose worn and sagging nerves still jump, jig, hop to the ancient syncopated rhythm that came, it is true, out of Africa, and reached London and Paris via Broadway in time to find me out and set my heart valves thumping when it was no longer decent that they should.

Habit, that's all, not conscious habit, not so easy to smash as that — a hidden iron web of habit formed by the cells of my body that holds me in a vice. Not till I die shall I get free, never till I die, and even then—who knows?

CHAPTER VII

WHAT it comes to is that I doubt the validity of experience, of all and any experience. Each event that took hold of me seemed to be something that it wasn't. I thought that I recognised it, thought that I was enduring certain things, discovering others, avoiding still others again. I used words about what happened to me, said: "This is love. This is the real thing, I shall always love this man," or, "This is pain, unendurable, unforgettable, I shall never get over it," or, "This is horrid and vile, I could never have anything to do with this." None of those pronouncements were true. I found quite soon that my eternal love was gone, my unforgettable pain forgotten, and I came to like what I had once found nauseating.

Life carried me along as I sank deeper into the dream; twitched my arms and legs, and twisted my head as an electric current will, animating a dead body, and my body scurried this way, slid that way, was propelled and repulsed by complicated magnetic forces and my mind was carried with it, for I could only notice what I thought I saw as I went on my erratic, unvolitioned way. But what I saw were phantoms

moving in a phantasmagorical world of billowing mist and flickering shadow.

It is difficult to recognise objects in a mist. No one looks natural in a dream. The Hugo I knew was a phantom, so was Jock, and I engaged with the first in an imaginary love affair, and with the second in a phantom marriage. But strangely I seem to have been almost right, quite often, about events; seem to have anticipated what was going to be true, but then when it became true, I had slid past it, got beyond it, so missed it. Everything passed me, just escaped me. I thought I loved Hugo when I flung myself into his arms, and I thought I no longer loved him when I left him, but it was really the other way round. I grew very fond of him; but grew tired of his caresses, which I had wanted before I was fond of him.

My relations with Jock Bailey were even more confused. Jock himself is not indistinct in the same way as Hugo. His image has not faded. It is hard, vivid and angular, but it gyrates like a top. When I try to contemplate it, I grow dizzy. Who was he? What kind of man was he? I haven't a notion. It's not only that I can't remember what I felt when I married him. I think, I am almost sure, that I married him because I thought of him as a very congenial friend who did better than anyone the things I liked doing. But I knew, or thought I knew him, for

an enemy the instant I married him, and it wasn't until he went to prison that I felt identified with him in his misfortune, as one would feel with a great friend. We were enemies while we lived together, we became friends when we were separated. That was true, in any case, of me if not of him. I don't know what he felt. I thought I knew, but I cannot tell now, for at the end of the five years, he who had always been inarticulate, suddenly spoke, and what he said was so startling that it made me doubt every single fact concerned in our relationship. That's my chief difficulty. I lived with him for five years, under an impression so strong, surrounded by facts seemingly so positive, that I didn't for an instant doubt their reality. Then when it was all over, he suddenly held up a mirror to me that showed me myself and all the facts of our united life, as totally different from what I had thought them. So how can I say anything positive about my marriage? I can't. I can only say that it seemed to me, or more exactly that I think it seemed to me, to be no marriage at all.

It may be possible to say what it was not.

Two against the world, an alliance against Life the enemy, if that's marriage then mine wasn't one. The ceremony I went through with Jock Bailey did not make us allies or friends. It divided us. I went to church with one man, a man whom I knew very slightly, the best man to

hounds in the county. I knelt down, was blessed by the parson, turned round and came out of the church door with another, someone I'd never seen, someone with a new face, new voice, new swaggering walk, a stranger who seemed to me to have sly, vindictive eyes and a cruel twist to his mouth. The parson had said I was bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, and that what God had joined together no man must put asunder. I had said I would love, honour and obey. Jock had said with all my worldly goods I thee endow, and the idea was that the arrangement would last in sickness and in health till death parted us.

It seemed evident quite soon that God had nothing to do with it, that it was indeed a very ungodly affair. The bone and flesh part of it appeared to be rather like a long-drawn-out boxing match between a man and a woman who hung off near the ropes most of the time watchful of each other's slightest movement, then rushed together, were locked in a cruel embrace for a second or two, and wrenched free again.

I have mentioned my wedding night. I don't want to dwell on it. But I wonder if I've got it right. Perhaps even about that I've been wrong. The sleep-walking bit is incomprehensible and ridiculous, if the man was not, on that occasion, at least, a ruffian. Perhaps he was simply clumsy. Perhaps he didn't know what to do about me. Probably he didn't understand

what I'd said to him about Hugo. How could he? After all, why should he? My scruples and my nerves are incomprehensible, even to myself. I had some sort of notion that I still belonged to Hugo. My heart had in a curious way gone back to him when I left him. I remember almost fainting in the little village church when I knelt before the parson with Jock, and I recall a sudden feeling of panic, a wild impulse to jump to my feet, rush out of the church and go back to Hugo. Jock couldn't know this, or perhaps he did sense it. Perhaps the idea of Hugo maddened him. I had told him too much, and he had translated what I'd told him into his own rough language. I'd married him because I'd got into trouble with another man and had to marry someone. He put it to himself simply, and it looked ugly and he didn't feel comfortable, for he had accepted the role I'd offered and that, he probably told himself, wasn't anything to swank about. His self-esteem was injured. He must do something to get it back. The obvious thing was to dominate. He'd married the girl, hadn't he—well, he'd teach her to respect him. He'd show her in the only way he knew how.

He must have had an exasperating, nerve-wracking sense of being out of his depth and out of his element when he found himself with a nervous, quivering girl shut up for the night in

the royal suite of that Paris hotel. He'd never occupied rooms like this and had no intimate knowledge of well-bred women. He didn't know how to treat girls who showed temper, but he knew how to handle horses, and so that's how he handled me.

I can see it that way now. I didn't then. It may be a true picture—I don't know—I don't know, as I say, anything. But I think that I must have liked him, physically, from the beginning, and I think I must have responded to his rough treatment quite soon, for I lived with him quite a lot off and on, in between rows during those five years, considering the number of other women he took up with during that time. I didn't know about them all. I only knew about some, and suspected the existence of the others, but I kept going back to him. And yet I minded the other women very much. I laughed a good deal during my married life; the sound of the tray rattling downstairs, that I've already mentioned, so there must have been something that struck me as funny about it all. Perhaps it was finding myself clinging to this stranger. I remember calling him darling, whispering into his ear in the dark, in bed. That may have struck me in the morning, or on some other later morning, as comic. But why did I do it? What did I want, hope to get, imagine he could give me? Children? The squaw yearning for a little papoose, sub-

missive to her Buck Indian? Probably that was it, only I had no children by Jock, couldn't ever have any by any man. The Swiss doctors had been obliged to remove that possibility, so that if it was some natural craving, well, it was a futile mistake on the part of dumb nature, and the whole thing became a farce. All the same, I must have enjoyed the farce. I must have had a good time with him in those casinos, must have found the gambling, racing and all the rest of it quite satisfactory. The thunder of hoofs and flash of colours past a winning-post, the turn of a card on a green baize table, such moments of suspense were evidently enough to live for.

The excitement, the noise, the queer hot smells, the strange crowds, the beating music, the pornographic plays; certainly I liked it all, and I must have thought I was happy with Jock. I must have thought at times that he cared for me, for I remember a very strange thing—namely, that I was surprised when I found out for the first time that he was untrue to me. I actually made him a scene, the sort of scene Maggie made Buck. In fact, I behaved just as if I thought I was really married. Yes. It's very queer, that, when you think of it. Something must have happened that I've forgotten, to make me think he cared for me. He must have said so, I suppose, in a tone that carried conviction; or perhaps I was simply foolish enough to think that he liked me because

he wanted sometimes to sleep with me. Perhaps I didn't know then how men can want that sort of thing from women they hate or despise. I can't remember what I knew or didn't know. I only remember storming, raging, accusing him of caring nothing for me, and that's funny, too, because it was literally true, but I only said it because I didn't believe it, because I thought he'd deny it, as he did, but I think he was laughing up his sleeve at me. Strange how difficult it is to believe that the person nearest to you, the man called your husband, definitely dislikes you, thinks you a bore, a nuisance, and a fool. It took me a very long time to realise this. Perhaps I never quite realised it. The word husband must have had some extraordinary power, or the fact of being beside him, of living in the same house with him, of driving in the same carriage, of going in and out of the same door. Treachery in such circumstances seemed to me, I suppose, unthinkable, so I didn't believe in his.

Infidelity is not necessarily treachery. Buck had been unfaithful to Maggie for years, but he didn't betray her till Sonia got hold of him. She appeared on the scene in 1910, when David was seven years old, but she didn't interest herself in Buck until she finished with Jock. It was Jock who first took up with her. He brought her down to stay in my house in the Midlands. I remember the day she first appeared out hunting. I re-

member that Buck came up to me with a face like thunder, and growled into my ear: "That woman's so soaked in perfume she'll spoil the scent." Maggie and I thought her ridiculous with her dead white face, scarlet baby mouth and opulent figure, and we thought Buck agreed with us.

But I race ahead. Sonia was the means of ending my life with Jock, but she wouldn't have done that, I imagine, if he and I had been friends. For she didn't want him, she only wanted his money. Nor would he have forged that cheque of Bill Moffat's had he not been hatefully afraid of me. That's the nasty, bitter thing I'll never get rid of, the barbed thorn still festering, that he should have done that, forged a cheque and gone to prison, when I was still a rich woman. If he had come to me—if he'd only told me again even then. What difference did it make that I was divorcing him? He was afraid to tell me.

He wasn't a criminal. He was simply out of his element after he married me. A beautiful, oh, a very beautiful animal in an impossible environment. I can see him now coming out of the stable yard on the back of some nice bit of horse flesh, with his long legs touching the sensitive flanks so delicately and lightly, his broad, easy shoulders, slouching a little, his small head quiet and a twisted smile on his hard, wizened, handsome, nut-cracker face. He was absolutely right in

stables and among horses. His legs were as beautiful as theirs, his small, narrow head as clean, and he was as silent as they were and moved with the same mute arrogance. Or standing in the hunt kennels surrounded by beautiful white and tan brutes, he was right, he held his own with them.

But he was a pathetic man off a horse, so why did he dismount? He shouldn't have. If he'd only stayed where he belonged in the Midlands, he would have been safe; he didn't. If he'd only gone on galloping for ever across those green fields, if he'd stuck to his horses, his barmaids and his horsey pals; he wouldn't. He got down out of the saddle at once, as soon as we were married, was only waiting, it seemed, for the chance to leave it all, didn't like it, really, cared nothing for horses or hounds, grassland or plough-land, windy sky or sunny gardens. He hated it secretly, was sick of it all, had quite other ambitions, was dreaming quite other dreams, all the time he was in the horse-dealing business; was dreaming of Paris and Monte Carlo, of hot casinos and flash restaurants and incredible French women—women like Sonia—while he schooled his horses in cool, dim, white-railed paddocks, took them gently, persuasively, beautifully back and forth over the jumps, and taught them manners and instilled into them the wisdom, drilled into them the exquisite technique

that was his one talent, the only thing in the world he was good at.

Funny, wasn't it? I went to church, as I say, with a gentleman jockey who wasn't a gentleman and a horse coper who hated horses, and I came home from church with a silly parvenu, whose ambition it was to wear diamond shirt-studs, over-tip waiters and appear before the eyes of a gaping public in the company of prostitutes and millionaires.

Money, bank-notes and sovereigns, ten-shilling notes and sixpences, slaved for, drudged for, squeezed out of life with frenzied fingers, clutched at, stolen, flung into gutters and cesspools; billets de milles, folded fragile tokens of the stupor that goes as happiness, passing so quickly across the baccarat tables. "Faites vos jeux messieurs—rien ne va plus. Banco—Banco pour quarante mille francs. La main passe."

Money. Is it one of the important things to a life? Important, I mean, in the simplest sense. I don't think so. I think it is only important as a lie, the biggest lie civilisation has told to men. I think it's the giant token for all the rubbish in the world, and a false one at that, like a casino plaque for a thousand francs that you can't cash anywhere outside the Casino. A promise of power that produces paralysis, a promise of happiness that lands you in the uneasy world of the opium-eaters, a means of procuring false

friends, false lovers, a false and exquisite environment, the magic talisman in a world of unreality, that's money.

Americans are sentimental and romantic about money, glaring sign of the childishness of their nature. The decent ones treat it reverently, are shy and reserved and quixotic about it, as some people are about their religious convictions. In my father's house it wasn't mentioned. No one talked about money there, it would have been considered as bad a breach of manners as to have talked about God or Jesus Christ in Buck Dawson's. And I acquired unconsciously from that American background a curious collection of scruples and prejudices about it, the naïve scruples of a simple believer. We knew, we Americans, we believed as a nation, in money as a great power. It was, indeed, the only one we did know. Call it our national God, well we took it seriously. Just as in Buck Dawson's world a certain attitude was required toward family, class, or the King's service, so in mine, a certain attitude toward money was considered obligatory. One could give it away, since it was precious, but one couldn't accept it, save under the most rigid restrictions. Presents must be paid for, by true affection or in kind. Everything one acquired must indeed be scrupulously paid for. One could pay too much, but one must never pay too little. It was permissible to be extravagant to the point

of folly, generous to the pitch of vulgarity, and it was considered rather good form to be careless about the precious stuff. But to be greedy or mean was unpardonable, and even to be careful, slightly infra dig.

Those English people never understood my attitude toward Jock. No one understood it except Maggie. They merely thought I was a fool or shamefully in love with him. It was incomprehensible to them that a woman should allow a man to play ducks and drakes with her fortune, because she was too shy to mention the subject of money to him.

But why go into all this if it isn't important? Well, it was important in the dream, the particular dream I'm talking of that lasted from 1904 to 1914. For the phantoms in that eerie world were obsessed by money, and all through the whirling, jangling course of it sounds the ghostly chink of gold and the rustle of bank-notes.

Jock said when we were engaged, how odd that sounds: "I'm givin' up my job at Bill's, is that right?" Then a little later: "I'll have nothin' o' my own, not a bob when I give up my job—at Bill's—you know that, don't you?"

"How much did you get at Moffat's?"

"I got five hundred as a screw and percentages on sales, makin' usually about as much again."

"How much would you like of your own?"

"How d'ye mean, how much would I like?"

"I mean as an allowance, to spend as you like on yourself!"

"I dunno—Caroline—I dunno."

It was all very difficult, I made it unnecessarily so by being squeamish, and he added to the difficulty by being scared and ignorant and again as always, inarticulate. It was settled in the end that he should have two thousand a year, settled on him for life and no share in general expenses for upkeep of houses or anything of that sort. He seemed satisfied. He seemed not to know anything about finance. He said he had no head for it, that at Bill Moffat's he'd never had anything to do with the business side, and Bill corroborated this statement. He brought his horse alongside mine one day and said bluntly:

"Don't give Jock too much money, Miss Caroline. He's a child, he'd be any crook's game. You just give him enough to play with and keep him happy; and watch his racing. He's a bit of a plunger, is our Jock, one of those superstitious chaps. He believes in luck. It's about all he does believe it, in the way of Providence. Well, he's in luck now, and I hope you are, too. I think you are." He cleared his throat, got fussed and pompous. "I think you are. He's a very decent fella, and I'm sorry to lose him."

It sounded a little as if I were taking over a stud groom, I thought to myself.

No one else said anything. Maggie was very casual and matter of fact. She didn't like the match, but gave out that it was just the sort of thing she had hoped I would do. "Now we've got her for good," she said. "As Mrs. Jock Bailey, she's a permanency." It was a great surprise to everyone when we didn't come back from Paris. Maggie wrote: "What on earth are you doing in Paris all this time? Aren't you coming back for Goodwood? What's all this about Biarritz? Whoever heard of going to Biarritz in August, or Trouville, either. It's a horrid place. Do come home and look after your dogs and things."

But we went to Trouville, and Jock was lucky at Boule. He would play all night with five-franc chips and drag himself away at dawn in a fever of satisfaction with a couple of hundred francs he had won in his pocket.

I didn't understand. I laughed. I said: "One would think you'd won a thousand pounds, you're so excited." It was a stupid thing to say. I remember how his small eyes changed. They'd a trick of seeming to change colour when he was startled.

The next time I saw him playing he was using twenty-franc plaques, and by the end of the following winter season in Monte he had joined me at the baccarat table.

And he came to me one night and said: "I say,

Caroline, I'm in the deuce of a fix. I lost five thousand francs to-day and I'm cleaned out. Haven't got a bob in the world."

"Draw a cheque."

"Nothin' to draw on."

"You mean there's nothing in your account in the bank?"

"That's what I mean."

"But the last five hundred pounds?"

"Gone."

He was staring out of the window with his hands in his pockets, a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. Suddenly he wheeled on me and said roughly: "It ain't enough, ye know, it can't be done, livin' the life we live."

"How much is enough, Jock?"

"An extra thousand might do it."

I hated such discussions. I hated them so much that I was prepared to do anything to avoid them, and so two years later I made my account at my London and Paris banks a joint account, and left him free to draw what he liked, and that was fatal. I should have remembered Bill Moffat's advice.

No one but Maggie could have understood my difficulty. Suppose I had tried to explain to Buck Dawson or any of his friends? Wouldn't they have thought my sensitiveness about money as vulgar or more so than callousness. They weren't

sensitive. They despised money. They wanted it, coveted it, adored it and despised it. It was their vice and their bugbear. They were slaves to it, and they despised it so much that they took it from anyone, and they despised me for having a lot of it. My American dollars earned for me in England a false personality, and the way I spent them, a fantastic reputation for folly.

Jock's attitude was quite different. Money to him was magic. Finance was an impenetrable mystery. Until his marriage he had feared money and worshipped money as some men fear and worship the devil, and when he got money, he went, I think, a little out of his mind. He was like an over-wrought, over-excited child, but not a normal child or a healthy one. I had expected him to contribute one strong good thing to our common life, an abundant supply of clean animal vitality. He brought instead a set of stunted, twisted, brutalised senses, a collection of starved appetites, pathetic, tawdry dreams and a brain that reeled at the sight of folded notes on a gaming table.

He was bound to fall a victim to any cocotte who rolled her eyes at him, or any Continental adventurer who called himself a prince, and looked like the hero or the villain, for that matter, of a thriller. He made straight for every shrine where the God of Luck was worshipped and fell among thieves there, while he struggled with his

deep bewildering superstitions. He was like a faun, a wild, shy, frightened creature of the woods, prancing in an ecstasy of fearful hilarity, down the Rue de la Paix. And he had the face of a faun, a look of low brute cunning, a small, cruel, inhuman twist to his lips, and he exhaled a different vitality from most of us. It was like the breath of the earth itself, and it made him seem queer, powerful and strangely attractive to jaded women like Sonia.

But why take this marriage of mine so seriously? It wasn't serious. It is only comprehensible as a joke, the sort of rough joke that sets bar-rooms aroar. One of the old Elizabetrans in rollicking vein would have made a good play of us, the horse coper turned Continental dandy, flaneur of boulevards, and his Red Indian squaw got up in satin and sables with rouge on her swarthy cheeks.

Nothing happened worth recounting till Jock gave Sonia a cheque when there were no funds in our account to meet it, then tried to swindle his old partner. If he'd been content to swindle me there would be nothing to tell. Up to that moment it was no more interesting, really, than a married life than a ride on a roundabout with a giant hurdy-gurdy grinding out a vulgar tune, and a motley crowd staring. The atmosphere of a drunken country fair on Bank Holiday, or of Barnum and Bailey's circus. There was tinsel

and sawdust and the stench of beasts. There were agile ladies in tights doing incredible stunts and conjurors taking rabbits out of hats and there were lions roaring and elephants snuffling, and the sound of a whip cracking, and a lot of money was being lost on dice and horses, and the turn of a card, and drinks were handed day and night over the counter.

And all the time he was scared. He had been scared all his life, and he couldn't stop being scared now. What was he afraid of? He'd been afraid of starving up to the day he married me. Every time he saw a tramp lying in a ditch he'd turn sick with fright, he told me this during that one half hour in his prison cell when he talked to me before his trial. And after he was married he was afraid just the same, afraid there was a catch somewhere, afraid he'd wake up and find it all a dream, afraid I'd go back, as he put it, on my bargain, afraid of his good luck, and afraid, just afraid out of habit. So he behaved like a man who'd been condemned by the doctors and had only a short time to live and wanted to cram into it as much excitement and pleasure, as much activity of every kind as possible; and so we rushed from one place to another, rushed this way and that way, ate too much, drank too much, spent too much money, and slept too little. Except for two winter months each year when I insisted on going back to be near Maggie and her

boys, we were never free from crowds of people.

Such a queer dream, peopled by such strange spectres. Jock is no more natural in my memory than the others. He expands and contracts, broadens and thins, as I watch him, like a man in Alice's Wonderland. A nightmare man ; gyrating beside me in nightmare houses, nightmare hotels, surrounded by nightmare crowds of squinting people. It is a very crowded dream, and everything in it has a distorted, deformed appearance. We had begun at once to accumulate houses, and all the paraphernalia that went with them and all the people. They loom now out of a livid mist, edifices of a distorted imagination, peopled by creatures in monstrous masks that might have been painted by Breughel: castellated mansions and colonnaded villas, old hoary towers and new pink plaster walls. We bought a place in Scotland, a house in Mayfair, a villa on Cap Ferrat, an eighteenth-century hotel in Paris. We bought a hundred beds, gold beds and brocaded beds, mahogany and oak beds, beds with high damask canopies and beds with plump, carved Cupids rollicking behind the lace pillows. We bought half a thousand tables and chairs and Turkish and Bokhara and Chinese rugs and Aubusson carpets and Sèvres china and many lustres with twinkling crystal pendants. And strange people thronged the rooms that held these things, slept in the beds, sat at the tables, were reflected in the

mirrors, unknown and unknowable people, whose inimical strange souls looked out sometimes from behind their masks, through the slits of their eyes. And I see myself a blindfolded woman among them, playing a frantic game of blind man's buff with them, bumping into the sharp edges of costly cabinets, tumbling into smothering mountains of pillows, being caught in the arms of one man then another, whose face I couldn't see, whose identity I couldn't distinguish, and I have the sensation as I recall it all, of struggling through deep sand, of floundering, of dragging my heavy feet and of fighting for breath, and that, too, is a sensation common in bad dreams.

But I didn't understand what was happening. I didn't realise that when I'd left Hugo I'd let go an anchor and been swept out into the swift current of a stream that was rushing over rapids, just ahead. I was like a drunken woman in a canoe being carried over a falls. If I had a sense of danger, it was only for a second. If I roused myself and caught a glimpse of banks rushing past, I instantly sank back into somnolence, and I would mumble to myself as my eyes closed, "This is fun, I like this rocking motion, I like the speed at which we're travelling. It makes me feel so alive. Yes, this is life. I'm living at last." And I would lapse again into stupor.

But the odd thing is that I thought it was Jock's

doing. I was convinced that it was he who wanted all those houses and motors and servants. I was under the impression that it was his Idea, that we were leading the life he liked, and that I was doing it all to please him. But now I don't know. I'm not sure. It may have been just the other way round. I am certain of nothing that concerned him.

PART III

CHAPTER I

I'VE made a new friend and I've placated Joanna. I've given her the gramophone and one of my old Paris frocks. The gramophone sounds from the kitchen now, but I don't think Joanna dances to it. She doesn't, I fancy, know how. Perhaps long ago in Sweden, she stood opposite a village yokel, her hands on her heavy hips, and moved her big feet in time to a fiddle. I don't know. I know nothing about her, but I want her to be nice to me.

My feelings about this place have changed. I've got used to it. That instinct to dig oneself in has been at work. When my lease of this house is up, it will be up in a month, I shall be sorry to go. I shall have again the sensation of being torn up by the roots, the same helpless dangling feeling I had when I left Paris, and before that when I gave up my house in the Midlands, near Maggie.

And I don't know where to go when I leave here. There seems to be no object in going anywhere. The house I was born in outside San Francisco is gone. It split open in the earthquake and caught fire, and the stones it was made of were carted away afterwards. Then

when the holes in the ground were filled up, the place was sold in lots to a building contractor. The ranch? No, I don't think I can go there. It was Jock's refuge, it's not mine. He went there when he came out of prison. Why should I mind his having lived there for the last five years of his broken life with a Mexican girl? I don't mind. But I don't want to know any details, don't want to hear about it. And I like it better here—I'd rather stay here, only I can't. Miss Elizabeth is coming home.

It's not my country this, or my kind of house. I know my own country when I see it just as I know my stormy weather, my roaring wind. A gaunt land with haggard heavy-shouldered hills where the big raw-boned frame of the earth is bared to the eye, that's my kind of country; or prairie lands with black sunlight glittering on the spears of dark prairie grass that I recognise, and a particular kind of house, gloomy, with steep gables, set back from the road in a thick clump of trees, yews, or hemlocks or pines; that's my house. I came on it the other day a few miles from here. I've seen it in lots of places, in California, in France, in Germany. Whenever I see it I want to stop, go up the tunnelled path to the door and try to get in. It is forbidding but it invites me. It has wooden balconies at the windows, painted a chocolate brown. It is of weather-stained plaster usually, sometimes of yellowish

brick, solid and square. The sun never penetrates to its shuttered windows and the shutters are always closed. The rooms, I imagine, are papered in ugly wall-papers and have hideous chimney pieces and a lot of brown painted wainscoting. I tried to get into it the other day, but the door at the top of the steep flight of steps was locked, and I couldn't see anything through the shutters. The garden was thick with weeds, the grass ragged round the trees. Joanna says it's been empty a long time, that it's supposed to be haunted. I could probably buy it cheap.

But of course I won't buy it. How can one buy a dream house, or send cartloads of furniture into a place that one knows and already lives in in a dream?

There's no way of taking one's strong tired body into that world. But I'm getting confused. This is the dream, this windy village full of sun and sea breezes and shouting youths, this little white house that I came on by accident. The other is the real one; the other is my house, and I've been living there always, in those dim rooms with Tawaska, and David Dawson. John Merryweather, my father, comes there sometimes. He comes galloping across the prairie and calls to me from a long way off, and I go to the narrow window and wave to him. I can see all the earth from that window, the Pacific coast and New York Harbour, China and the Philippine Islands,

Italy, where my mother died, Paris and England, where David and his three brothers grew from small boys into men, while their father, Buck Dawson, went on with the business of breaking their mother's stubborn heart.

In the meantime, I've made my peace with Eliza Perkins' dwelling. There's been a gradual adjustment between us. It has made room for me and I've fitted into it. It's as if I'd grown smaller. It doesn't irritate me as it did and it no longer snubs me. I've acquired new habits that seem to meet with its approval. I play Patience and read Miss Elizabeth's Bible and drink tea with my lunch, and I'm making a patchwork quilt out of bits of old silk. Joanna has taught me how to do it. It will be a gay affair. It will take a long time to finish. Perhaps I'll never finish it. Perhaps it will last as long as I want it to.

And so I've earned the approval of this house. When I open the gate and walk up the path, its prim little face smiles at me. I find the way the sunlight and shadows from the big elm trees play over it very pretty and the hollyhocks by the side verandah please me very much. They are childish flowers. It is all childish. It makes me laugh. It gives me that light, lifted, relieved feeling I used to have when I went into the nurseries at Buckhaven Park.

That's why I want to stay. It's such a rest,

such a joke. It's so extraordinary to lie in one's bath and find written on the bathroom wall the words, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost." It's so startling to reach for a book and find in one's hand Paley's "Evidences of Christianity." Eliza Perkins is a very naïve and positive person, much more positive than the Abbé. She is one of the early Christians, not a martyr, but a Protestant, one of the lot who shook the dust of Europe from their feet and took to the wilderness as a protest. The Abbé was subtle and indulgent and seductive. He was a professional charmer, trained to charm souls into the labyrinthian mysteries of the Church of Rome. Eliza Perkins would charm no one. She is all edges and corners, she's a flashing sword, and she lives on terms of fearless intimacy with the terrible God of the Book of Revelations, in a childish house, full of childish things.

But this room of hers doesn't look as it did when I first came. I'm acquainted with it now and don't notice it much, but if I recall the separate first impression it made on me two months ago, I see that it is a different place. It isn't as clean and bright as it was. There's something about it now that stamps it as my room, something that has always been present in all the rooms I've ever lived in anywhere. It is difficult to define. It is like a shadow, or a heavy odour

or a coating of dust. It hasn't much to do with the few things I've added to its original contents, boxes of cigarettes, ash trays, a few books, a typewriter and the old Aztec head, nor is it that I've pushed her things about. It's rather that I've made Eliza's things mine by touching them, and so have transformed them. My touch is heavy. Perhaps that's it. So is my tread. I've dragged on the window curtains, made them limp ; they're a little soiled. I've trodden on the carpet ; there's no actual trace of me on it except for a blot of ink near this table, but I fancy that I can see the shadow of my strong feet on its faded surface, and I've flattened the cotton cushion on the seat of the chair by the window.

The smell of the room is of course quite different. It has definitely my own smell now, mixture of cigarette smoke and the scent I always use, Coty's Ambre Antique and other more subtle ingredients. Tawaska used to say that every human being had a special smell by which he could be known. Dogs know us that way. He said he would know me anywhere in the dark by my smell, even if I'd changed my scent, soap, dressmaker, bootmaker, everything. He said no two people could live together in intimacy who didn't like each other's smell. I don't know if he liked mine or found it abhorrent, I don't know how he could recognise it. He never touched me, never even, now that I think of it, shook hands

with me. In any case, this room is permeated now with what Tawaska called the unmistakable effluvia of a self, mine, and I'm sure that when Eliza Perkins comes back, she'll throw open all the windows; perhaps she'll even fumigate the place.

But suppose Tawaska were to come, after I'm gone, would he know I'd been here? I wonder. That's the sort of thing I suspect that he could do. He had learned to breathe differently from most human beings, so why shouldn't he have a sense of smell as good as a dog's? I can imagine him in this room, moving his paws and sniffing the air and saying to himself, "The black woman with white eyes—the blind woman who tramped the earth along a road that crossed mine occasionally, she stopped here to rest, for a while."

Well, I shan't stay long now, and I wish I didn't have the feeling that he might turn up at any moment. I can't understand it. I've tried to get rid of it. It makes me restless! I catch myself looking quickly out of the window and down the path to the gate, expecting to see his great form, his white head. He is ten or twelve years older than I. He must be getting on for seventy. An old man. But those words don't apply to Tawaska; they mean nothing. Perhaps he is really immortal. Perhaps he's an elemental. What nonsense am I talking? The next thing I'll be saying to myself is that he never existed

at all, that he is the creature of my imagination, merely the man I might have known profoundly, and believed utterly, had he existed.

I've had no word from him since he came to see me in Paris. That was five years ago. Everything was over, had been for a long time, my marriage, the war, Maggie's life, David's childhood—everything. Maggie'd been gone nearly ten years, so had David, and I'd been living on without them, just as if there were something to live for.

Maggie's was a pre-war drama. She died in the early summer of nineteen fourteen, and my life was lived before that. But the war ended eleven years ago. It is nineteen twenty-nine now, and that leaves eleven years to be accounted for. I can't account for them, I don't know what I did with them. They seem to have passed, unnoticed, very quickly and stealthily. But I remember looking at them stretching ahead and feeling they would be unbearably long.

Marcella Mackintosh accounted for some of them. She killed a lot of time for a lot of us after the war. She'd been living in Paris, off and on, during the war and before. She was there when I first met Sonia in 1909, but I hadn't heard of her. She didn't become a world force till 1918. Before that, she lived an obscure, largely nomadic existence. I think she ran a circus for a time, travelled with a negro orchestra, and kept a hotel,

or perhaps it was a brothel. I'm not sure. The legends about her were many. They became more and more fantastic as her fame increased. The war gave her her chance. She was one of its more picturesque products. The Bolsheviks, too, had a hand in producing her. She was a sort of female stepchild of the mass-man, a comic and monstrous offspring of the world revolution, who'd got it all wrong, got hold of the wrong end of the stick and was using it to beat a tom-tom.

Her one achievement, up to 1918, had been Sonia. She had made Sonia—at any rate she thought so. But I think she was much less important to Sonia than she thought. I think Sonia simply used her as a publicity agent, maid-of-all-work and procureuse. Sonia was much more intelligent than Marcella, and she had the advantage of being heartless. I knew nothing about their relationship until long afterwards, but I believe that they had a flat together in the days when Sonia was a mannequin, and that Marcella darned Sonia's stockings, pressed out her frocks and all that sort of thing in her off hours when she came home from her night club, house of assignation or circus, whatever her business was. It was in one of these places that she found the Vicomte de Castelray, but it was at Voisins or some quiet little place where the cooking was good that she introduced him to Sonia. This done, she faded into the background, and she kept in

the background while Sonia mounted from strength to strength, and she was still in the background when Jock and I met Sonia, five years before the war. De Castelray had vanished by that time—was dead, I suppose. He must have been. Sonia was living by herself in a very pretty house in Passy, near the Bois, and was looking vaguely for a husband. At any rate, she seemed to be by herself. Marcella was not visible, nor was there any sign of a protector. No man's hat hung in the hall, and no man's name was especially connected with her luxurious establishment. She was a very clever and a very cautious woman. A good many men were known to be her friends, but she rarely appeared with any of them in public. She was very circumspect, very exclusive. She received between five and seven every day. A number of clever people made a habit of going to see her. She had created round her the kind of social life, so much appreciated by Frenchmen, called a *Salon*. She lived indeed exactly like a very exquisitely bred Frenchwoman and she was supposed to be Russian. It was an amazing achievement for the daughter of Scotch working people.

Her looks were the only drawback. They were useful in one way but a nuisance in another. She would have preferred, I imagine, a less blatant beauty. She had to make the best of what nature had given her, and she made the best of it by

dressing very soberly. She almost always wore black. Occasionally she wore white. I never saw her in any colour. There was a lot of flesh to her. Her skin was soft as a baby's and she had a baby face with a small, curly, pouting mouth, what's called a rosebud mouth, tucked between smooth, plump white cheeks. She never rouged them. But her mouth was scarlet and her long curling eyelashes were slightly thickened with black. Her eyes were big, round and a vivid blue. Her dark hair curled close to her head. The curls in the nape of her neck were enchanting, very enticing. She was all curls and curves. The big curves of her bosom and thighs tapered smoothly into delicate extremities. She had very slender arms, legs, wrists and ankles, small lovely hands, delicate arched feet. She was an old-fashioned Venus, and she looked brainless. She wasn't. That was one of our mistakes, Maggie's and mine. She chose deliberately to look silly.

We were mistaken about almost everything in her make up. We thought her soft, lazy, sensual, extravagant, and a fool. We thought her weak. We thought she was one of those vague Russians who float about exuding the "charm Slav." She was none of these things. She'd come from Perthshire. She was hard, energetic, avaricious, and extremely intelligent. She knew exactly what she wanted, was completely unscrupulous

about getting it, and had nerves of iron. She was very practical. What she wanted was money. Jock caught her eye. He seemed to have a great deal of money. She smiled at him. She lifted her big baby blue eyes to his face and held up her rosebud mouth, and he was a lost man.

I don't know what Marcella Mackintosh was doing at this time. Perhaps she was earning the money to help pay the butcher and the gas bill. Perhaps she was in the boulevards scouting for new men who would also pay. Perhaps she was sobbing her heart out in some dingy room somewhere, her monstrous body rolling in grief on a truckle bed, in awful imitation of a porpoise at play. One day she was to come into her own. The world would be at her feet and Sonia would come back to her with the world, but not yet. There had to be a war first and a revolution and Jock Bailey must be ruined and Maggie must die and a few other things had to happen before Sonia came back to her Marcella.

We met Sonia for the first time one Sunday, before Longchamps. Someone gave a lunch at Bagatelle; she was there, all in black, like a large black swan. Then we dined with her and found the Abbé sitting in her drawing room. He seemed very much at home in her house. She treated him with an exquisite playfulness, as one would treat a precious semi-sacred toy. I heard that he was one of the habitués of her salon. I

was puzzled by their relationship. I am so still. They said, when he died, that he had loved her as only saints can love. They said he was trying to save her soul, that she broke his heart in the end, and that he died of her.

It is dreadful to think of her pouring her ugly secrets into his poor, sensitive little ears. It is very curious to think of her telling him about her relations with my husband and Maggie's. But perhaps she didn't tell him. She was a Catholic and he was her Father Confessor, but perhaps she didn't think her affairs with men like Jock Bailey and Buck Dawson worth mentioning. Adultery and fornication may have seemed to her a normal, moral way of life. Perhaps it didn't occur to her that the Abbé would not consider them innocent pastimes. I don't know what she would consider wicked, I cannot conceive of her as afraid of perdition. My imagination breaks down when I try to picture her with shaking knees approaching the confessional box in the dim, vaulted church, where the little Abbé sat hidden. The Abbé never mentioned her name to me when I went to see him after Maggie's death. He may have known already more than I would ever know of the part Sonia had played in the tragedy, or he may have known nothing. I cannot tell. He was unfathomably deep. He was that mysterious thing, a priest, frail receptacle, filled to the brim with a dead

weight of other men's darkness, holding it sealed and safe.

I do not know what he may have suffered, do not know what, even he, would consider the unpardonable sin. I don't know whether he had before his eyes such a vision of white holiness that all and every act of ours appeared to him as equally dark and unclean. I only know that his little old body shrank before my eyes, shrivelled into a dry husk, and that his soul at last flew away out of his window, like a sparrow. When he crumpled up before my eyes, the day I went to him, I thought it was only the sense of my loss and Maggie's tragedy that overwhelmed him, but now I see that he may have known everything about all of us, and I seem to feel the impact of a dark flood of anguish pouring into that garret of his, to drown him.

Poor Abbé, exquisite friend, discreet priest and perfect worldling, I see him lift his shaking hand, see the chords in his thin throat contract, see a film come over his agonized little eyes, and I hear him whisper, "We are in the hands of God, my child, we are in the hands of God."

I don't believe it, Abbé, I believe we are in a trap, that we are caught in an iron machine. I believe we are blind worms, no more important in the Universe than the earth worms in Eliza's garden. I believe that this life is an illusion, I believe that literally. It is hideous, but it is not

true. It is no truer than a nightmare. There is something else, I think, beyond life, but we can't get to it, we can't get out, we are asleep, and struggling in our sleep, and we cannot awake and so we know nothing, see nothing, hear nothing, but the phantasmagoria of our dreams.

That's right, isn't it, Tawaska? That's what you think? Well, I agree with you. As for you, stone man out of Mexico, up there on Eliza's mantelpiece, I know now who you are. You're no God or superman, you're merely my ancestor, and I don't worship you. I hate you, for you've been my enemy always. Ancestor, mate and unborn progeny, the sons of my loins to whom I never gave birth; that's who you are, the ever-recurring male, the warrior and hunter and killer, the proud animal who stood upright some million years ago, the cruel and concentrated king of wild beasts whom I saw flashing like a sword in the body of first one man, then another. You were there, hidden in the lovers I took to my bed. It was you I caught sight of in Hugo, in Jock, in Philippe and Henry and Carlos. It was you who attracted me, whom I hunted and followed, but when I clasped them, those men, and held them, you vanished. There was only old Hugo, there was only Jock, there was only Philippe. Perhaps Carlos, the Spaniard, was most like the real you. I remember his face watching a bull fight. He looked very much as you do now, with your lid-

less staring eyes and stiff parted lips, and there was something of you in the two Mexicans I saw in Cordova, something dark, snakelike and sinister. There's a coiled granite snake in the British Museum that belongs to you.

* * * *

My new friend is Mike, who brings the milk. He's a bad boy and his pop licks him every Saturday night, but it don't hurt him much. It's a ritual, he'd miss it if deprived of it. It adds dignity and zest to his life.

"Pretty stiff lickin' I got las' Saturday," he announces with proud satisfaction, and he rubs reminiscently the seat of his pants. They are patched and are several sizes too big for him. They're kept from falling off him by a pair of black braces. Seen at a distance, he is a ragged caricature in small, of a broken-down American business man in his shirt sleeves, but there's nothing broken-down about Mike. The boy that projects from this apparel is gorgeous. He has a ravishing grin. It splits his freckled face from ear to ear. His front teeth are missing, his bare legs are covered with scratches. They are a golden brown. He is all a gold, glowing colour, and he walks proudly, holding himself very straight, as David Dawson used to do. I've often noticed how proud small boys are. It's one of the impressive things about them. Does Mike

care how he looks in those dreadful pants and that dirty shirt? Certainly not! He's far too absorbed in the world. It's a terrific place, not in the least frightening, merely new and big, big enough for anything. Anything may happen in it, all sorts of things, all new, all astounding. He's ready for them. That's why he's proud, because he knows life's coming and he's ready for it.

The scratches on his legs are from climbing trees and going after birds' nests through brambles. He collects birds' nests. He's got seventeen different kinds.

It's wonderful how loud he can whistle with those front teeth missing. I hear his whistle in the morning as he comes up the path to the kitchen door and go quickly to the window.

"Hello, Mike."

"Hello, Miss Merryweather."

"What's the news?"

"Nothin' much. We got a new baby up at our place las' night, and Ma don't feel too good this mornin', an' Jimmy, he hurt hisself jumpin' from the hay-loft onto a pitchfork. But it ain't nothin', the doctor says."

"What's the baby like?"

"Awful! Gee, he is ugly!"

"Found any birds' nests lately?"

"Nope—nothin', but there's a place up back o' Haskell's farm past the golf club—you know—

there's a clump of trees there near the rocks and a cave underneath—fine place for a camp or a smuggler's den. Ever been along the shore that way?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Wanna see the cave?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll meet you to-morrow mornin' six o'clock at the top of the hill by the gate to the golf club. I've got to be at the dairy at seven." He grins suddenly. "G'wan, yer foolin'—you'll never git up in time."

"See if I don't."

"Well, if you do, you better bring a gun. Mebbe there's Indians thereabouts." It's only half a joke, there's the gleam of an incredible hope in his eyes.

With Joanna's help I've been able to fit out the baby and send Mike's mother a few things that may come in useful. It's been fun playing Santa Claus in August to Mike's ragged brothers and sisters. But I distrust that sort of fun. There was no harm in spending a few dollars on boots and picture books, but the question of charities—why did I organise that home for crippled children in London, and work for the Lying-in Hospital? Why did I give so much money to the Abbé in Paris? Hugo sympathised. He helped me organise the home. His conception of life included a great deal of that sort of thing. But the point

is that I got satisfaction out of it. I would think, "I may be making a mess of my life, but at any rate I'm doing some good," and I'd pat myself on the back. Then there was the flattery, the fine image of myself that the doctors, nurses, grateful women and pleased kiddies held up to me. I did it for that, I suppose. Anyhow, it came to an end with Jock's crash. The august personages on those committees didn't want my name to figure any more, so I handed over, and I can't now find in such activities an answer to the question of what to do with the rest of my life. Suppose I went to New York, took up some work in the slums. But what? But why? What have I got to give besides money? Nothing! The money is all arranged for in my will. If I did try to find work of some such sort, it would be for my own sake, to escape from myself that way. Another defeat!

As for Mike, suppose I sent him away to school, put him on the high road of life? What right have I to interfere with him? I must keep my hands off him. Besides it's his youth that matters. It's the small boy who commands my respect, not the man he one day will be. The man who takes his place will be no more impressive than any man. Mike will be gone, just as David Dawson is gone. He'll disappear from the earth when his voice cracks.

He's not a bit like David Dawson. David was

an aristocrat. He was concentrated and intolerant, delicate and fearless. Donatello caught sight of him in the long procession of small proud boys that stretches through time, and put something of his fragile valour into the young St. John of the Bargello. There's the same look in the eyes, the penetrating, fearless sweetness and the complete confidence in the distant unknown.

Oh, God! I wish David had died.

It seems odd that no great painter has painted Adam in the Garden of Eden before the fall, as very young. He was a boy surely, and Eden was a nursery garden full of very young things, fresh, all so fresh. You see, Tawaska, I think that small boys, before adolescence, are, what one may say, God, if there were a God, meant man to be, and I think the image of God, if it exists on the earth, exists in the light body of a little boy, of any decent little boy.

Mike is a ruffian and a comic. He's the direct descendant of Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer, but he carries the magic and he makes me laugh with the old sudden spasm of delighted surprise. And he brings back the ache, too, in my side. My arms pull in their sockets. I want to put out a hand, find a square, hard palm in mine, want to be steadied by it and led as blind people are sometimes. But small boys don't like holding you by the hand. They like to walk independently beside you on tiptoe for the adventure that will appear

in a second at the turn of the road, ready to spring to meet it. How can they be ready, be poised lightly enough, be off quick enough, if they're joined to your heavy limbs?

David hated being touched. He never allowed anyone but his mother to kiss him, and she didn't much. A brief light kiss at bedtime, an instant's snuggle, his thin arms would cling round her neck for a second, then she'd loose them, straighten up, toss her short hair out of her eyes, in a boyish way very much as he did, tuck him up quickly and turn off to the nursery door. I would watch this leaning against the fireguard that was festooned with small shirts and knickers hung out to dry, and from my distance across the linoleum floor I could see the look in David's eyes. It was deep and clear and unutterably true. It was the look of a small boy who had perfect confidence in his mother, but was just a little afraid every night when she left him to go down the great long corridors and great big deep stairs of the enormous house that he would never see her again. He would never have acknowledged this. He knew; he had been taught, and he instinctively felt that boys must not show their feelings. Manliness was the ideal held up to him. Self-control was the objective of that nursery discipline, and he had learned a good deal about it by the time he was six years old. It was only in sleep that his heart betrayed him. Sometimes

in his sleep he would call his mother with desperate entreaty. His nurse told me. She said he was very high strung and that he loved his mother too much.

“Too much for what, Nanny?”

“Too much for safety,” she said. “It’s dangerous.” That was a queer word to use, I thought.

I do not want to write about David Dawson. It is too painful and too difficult, difficult because I feel it important to say nothing about him that is not exactly true. I’ve tried to stick to facts in this survey of a life, and only state those I could swear to, but I’ve failed. I find on looking over what I’ve written, that I’ve been obliged, repeatedly, to use the phrase “I think” instead of “I know.” Well, in regard to this boy I want no thinking or supposing. He was firm. He was unbending and brittle. He stands in the shadowy cavern of the past like a slim, white, marble column. His image is like a diamond in my mind. I could not bear to fumble over David.

Nor is this his story. He had nothing to do with it, or with us, and he should not have been concerned in it. His young life was going on quite separate from Maggie’s. He was supposed to know nothing about her unhappiness, and he would have known nothing had he loved her a little less; for when she was with those boys of hers she was the young, laughing, enchanting

creature I'd met in the beginning. To see her in the schoolroom, no one would have suspected what her life was with Buck.

I've no illusions now about Maggie. She didn't deserve the high, concentrated, chivalrous devotion David offered her. She didn't even value it, wasn't even aware of it.

It has come to me, while I've been writing this story, that her love for Buck and her life with Buck wasn't, after all, very interesting. Time hasn't damaged David Dawson or Tawaska. Nothing that has happened has changed those two for me. But Maggie has changed while I've been here. She changes constantly as I think of her, and she changed with me as we lived. We grew old and hard together, and life got the best of us both, and we stuck together at last in desperation, disappointed each in the other, and we would often look at each other with a grim, disillusioned, angry and bitter affection.

CHAPTER II

Life had taught us a thing or two by 1910. But nothing worth knowing and nothing quite true, only the usual boring, obvious half-truths that pass in the world for wisdom. Banal facts about sex, stale stuff about human frailty and the need for tolerance, formulas of compromise, how to make the best of a bad business, play for safety in a crisis, skate on thin ice, manage a man, propitiate women and win the approval of a bigoted community that thought a great deal of itself. We were slow, Maggie and I. Our heads were full of preconceived notions hard to eradicate, simple A.B.C. notions about goodness and badness, loyalty and treachery, courage and cowardice; all the stiff, bare things taught in nurseries and schoolrooms by people like Sister Anna and Nurse Moore, which didn't fit into Life's exposition of facts. Then there were a lot of other things not immediately connected with moral values about which we had unfortunately prejudices. Notions about happiness, about love, about human beings and the ways of Providence. We seem to have had an idea that Providence was playing a game with us and playing fair. We were curiously obsessed by the idea of justice as one of

the fundamental principles of the universe, and we believed that human beings were fundamentally kind. We had to unlearn it all, the A.B.C. of morals and the A.B.C. of sentiment. We saw the necessity and did our best. Obviously there was a hitch somewhere. Either the notions were wrong or the facts were wrong, and I, at any rate, felt obliged to accept the facts since Life demonstrated them to me as real; only Life was, after all's said and done, wrong, is a liar and a trickster, they had, those facts, no true reality.

I don't know which of us was the bigger dunce. I was slower witted than Maggie, but she was more obstinate. And she wasn't interested in most of the stuff Life taught us. She had a way, as I've already suggested, of simply not paying attention. To make her learn Life had to treat her with exceptional severity. Ordinary chastisements had no effect on her. She would slip quickly out of the teacher's grasp, make a contemptuous face at him and continue to ignore whole masses of fact that he maintained were of absorbing interest. As for the data of Life, which did seem to concern her, these she disputed with great stubbornness.

She was a specialist. The Life school taught only one subject that interested her. Love was her one subject, in particular, a special branch of it, passionate love between a man and a woman; and as time went on she neglected

almost all other interests in order to concentrate on it. This may not seem to make her peculiar among women, but she was singular, all the same, by virtue of her loyalty to her first notions. For studying, she refused to learn, to accept the teaching or modify her ideas about loving. She had an amazing nerve and treated Life with what one might call colossal cheek, disputing each fact brought to her notice and flatly contradicting the conclusions deduced from it.

It was pathetic to watch her, taking on Life, over this question of love. The thing developed into something very like a fight to the death. What made it pathetic was that she didn't see the disproportion. She thought she was a match for her antagonist and she stripped grimly for the combat, throwing away everything that could weigh her down. Her ideas about happiness, for instance—she didn't care any more about happiness, wasn't interested in that subject, knew when Sonia got hold of Buck that she'd never be happy again and accepted this and stood up to Buck and went on fighting. What for? one may ask. For her belief, of course. For that first, early fixed idea of hers that she and Buck belonged to each other for always, in spite of everything, because they simply couldn't ever not care for each other. You see, even after Sonia appeared, she could not accept for a long time the fact that Buck no longer loved her. In the face of accumulated

proof, of innumerable marshalled facts, in the face of insult, neglect, treachery and cruelty of many kinds she didn't believe that he had ceased to care for her. And she was right. That's the irony of it. She staked everything on the belief that a passion as deep as theirs and an association as close reached down to the very final tip of the roots of self and could not be destroyed. Life proved her wrong, but she was right, all the same, in spite of the facts.

Our two marriages provided for each of us a similar situation that was curiously dissimilar. I found it difficult to believe that Jock had always disliked me, although it was a fact. Maggie in the end wavered in her belief that Buck still cared for her, though her belief was founded on truth. That was her fatal mistake. She allowed the accumulated facts to blind her for a moment. She believed what she saw going on under her eyes, was convinced by Buck's face that showed dislike when he looked at her, his voice that was ice-cold when he spoke to her, his actions that betrayed a complete indifference to her suffering. He was obsessed, and for a long time Maggie recognised that his obsession had transformed him into something very like a lunatic, and for a long time she awaited his return to sanity. It took two years of Sonia to make her let go of the rope that had been Buck's anchor rope. She hung on to it so tight that as it was dragged from her,

inch by inch, it lacerated her hands. It was a case of strength against strength, and Sonia was strong and all or almost all Buck's weight was on her side, and so between them, the two powerful brutes made Maggie let go.

Neither of us had gauged correctly the power of the woman. We thought her charm too obvious to appeal to Buck. Her beauty seemed to us, as I've said, in the setting of that harsh hunting country, almost ridiculous. We could see why Jock was fascinated, but it didn't occur to us that Buck would be. I remember the first time she dined at Buckhaven Park. She was there, as Jock's lady, to those in the know, but in the eyes of the world, as my friend. She had given me no excuse for denying the friendship, no grounds for turning her out of the house. She was staying with us, at my invitation, as my guest. People who didn't know us very well talked of her as Caroline Bailey's latest curiosity. I was supposed to keep a sort of menagerie of exotic freaks and Sonia was welcomed in our hunting country as a sign and a symbol of my awful, depraved, dazzling, Continental life. I don't know how she had managed to impose herself as my dearest intimate. Her ways were subtle and smooth. She penetrated the barred doors and locked windows of our private life like a mist. Once inside, she materialised into a full-blown, solid woman. You didn't know how she'd got there,

but there she was, large as life and firmly established.

"Line," she called me, "Line, adorable sauvage." She usually talked French to me and she "tu toi'ed" me. But her insolence was very discreet. She stuck to just the right note, the note that gave me no chance to be rude, and she treated Jock as the outsider. She and I were women who understood each other. He was a mere man, an irresponsible child, who had taken a harmless, rather boring, fancy to her.

She had not yet got the money she wanted out of him. She had only bled him for a paltry two thousand pounds. But she was going to get a whacking big cheque from him and then she'd drop him, just as soon, in any case, as she found someone more substantial to replace him. She had been waiting for that. When she saw Buck, she knew she didn't have to wait any longer. Jock's fun was over; he didn't know it, but it was. He'd got to pay and clear off. I fancy she thought it out that night at Buck's dinner-table with the two men on either side of her. She would go with Jock to Monte Carlo, get the money, then turn her attention to Buck.

Buck appealed to her. He was just the man she'd been looking for. She recognised in him at once the powerful brute, with a capacity for passion adequate to assure her everything that she wanted. He was worth while. He was

infinitely more worth while than Jock Bailey. He was a more virile man, a richer man and a bigger pot socially. She thought cautiously while she turned big baby blue eyes to him. Of his virility she was certain. She was strongly attracted. She knew that he could give her a very good time. That he was well off was obvious, but she didn't know just how well off. And he had a wife. Would that matter? She looked at Maggie through her curly eyelashes, and there she, Sonia, made her mistake, for Maggie was nothing to look at. And so Sonia brushed her aside, not realising the weight of the thin, haggard little thing at the end of the table. Not that she thought of breaking up their marriage. She was a canny Scot and, as I've said, thoroughly practical. She didn't indulge in dreams and she didn't know how much she was going to get out of this or how much she was going to like Buck. It didn't occur to her that he was going to upset her mental equilibrium. Her senses were depraved, but, so far, had been controlled by her head. She wanted sexual excitement, never, indeed, was without it, but she wanted money more. Money was something you could depend on. Pleasurable sensations were ephemeral. Her appetite was already becoming jaded. No one aroused her senses for very long. She required constant change, elaborate variety, frequent new sensations, but sometimes she foresaw the

moment when there would be no new ones left. That was disquieting, or it would have been had she had not a serious side to her life, a perfectly definite job that saved her, steadied her, satisfied her. All women should have something of the kind. Hers was the amassing of money. She was a serious business woman. The fact that she dealt in caresses did not differentiate her as much as one might suppose from a traveller in electric fittings.

She betrayed nothing that night, of course. Indeed, nothing ugly poked its head above the pleasant, shimmering surface of that evening. It was smooth, and it glowed with rich colour like a still pond at sunset. The atmosphere comes back to me, the stillness, the glow, the magical mirage effect; no ripple, no mutter of distant thunder, nothing disturbs it.

That evening, that complete moment, hangs now in the cavern of the past like an iridescent crystal globe. It holds us all, for ever, with the big house, the lamplit rooms and our own figures, visible as a tiny miniature scene inside it. But if I transport myself back, pretend I am there again and look again from a different, closer place, I see us all reflected in it as if from the surface of a deep lake. I see the lighted candles, the glowing fires, the women's faces, frocks, jewels; the men's pink coats, the servants in black moving across the polished floor carrying

trays of shimmering glass, all very distinct beneath me, just as a mirrored reflection is, and the scene is broken by massed shadows, as the reflection of a sunset in the water of a pond would be broken by the shadows of trees. Broken by shadows of some other massive, unnoticed world, Buckhaven Park looms beneath me without substance but very vivid, and I see the light streaming from its windows out into the windy Park. The nursery wing is dark. Four small boys are asleep there with the night wind rushing in at their open windows; a man with a lantern is moving across the stable yard; the village is huddled in sleep at the gates and a winter moon is sailing with incredible speed through the cloudy sky.

An attractive picture, deep, subdued, rich, in the best English style. It held everything that Buck Dawson valued. Land, his own land; farms with barns full of oats and hay, cattle and sheep; stables full of horses and a solid mansion, his by right of inheritance to house securely his wife and his sons; and money, plenty of it, good food and good wine, well-trained servants, spacious, quiet rooms and a group of friends. Buck gazing upon this that night must have been well content. He was hypnotised by the appearance, as all of us were hypnotised; could not see that it was an illusion, only the reflection of a dream, could not see, down under the mirror

surface, the queer, dangerous realities, floating submerged objects of menace.

And we could not even see ourselves. We seemed to ourselves to be very jolly, healthy people who were making a success of life, and we seemed to each other to be great friends. We'd been hunting together all day and now we were dining together. Presently the group would break up into couples who would go off to sleep together. As married couples we presented a rather dashing but dignified spectacle. We were supposed, as married people, to understand each other, to be fond and humorous and tolerant. We considered ourselves rather more tolerant than most and rather more free from conventional jealousies. The assumption was that the husbands, though they might need a bit o' fun outside now and then, were, nevertheless, the protectors of their wives, and that the wives, though they couldn't always answer for their whiinsical emotions, were the loyal allies of their husbands. The assumption was that the women were friends who would not let each other down and that the men were friends, answerable to a certain code of honour. The women called each other darling, and the men called each other by nicknames. A further assumption was that, though marriage vows were not taken too seriously, still the women did each one belong in a very definite sense to the man she'd married, and it was

assumed that he recognised both the rights of property and responsibilities of ownership. His honour indeed was involved in the way she behaved. This was a fact, though it wasn't considered quite the thing to admit it. One admitted a certain laxity, one didn't insist on one's rights. That was bad form, but secretly one held to them, and if they were openly questioned, one defended them. The whole question became very involved at this point. There wasn't a man in that house who didn't turn an indulgent eye on the peccadillos of his friends' wives and not one who wouldn't see red if he caught out his own wife in adultery. And there wasn't a woman in the room, except Maggie, who wouldn't have gone to bed with the husband of her best friend if she fell in love with him. Curious how the men pretended to be broad-minded, wise men of the world and highly civilised people. The smoothness, the suavity, the cynicism, formed a thin coating. Perhaps it would take more than a scratch to pierce their armour. Under it, nevertheless, was the old savage male, ready to be blinded by passion and rush from his cave brandishing an axe at the first hint of danger. And yet they were spoiled; as cave men, they were no good. What they really cared about was safety, ease, comfort and luxury. They were primarily lazy and selfish.

Buck felt perfectly safe with Maggie. He was

convinced that whatever he did, she would never bring his house down round his ears and spoil his dinner. So he did what he liked, and considered her feelings less and less. He had grown heavier and coarser. He had been very shrewd in regard to business, and was now one of the richest coal-owners in the Midlands. He had forgotten his early romantic ambitions, forgotten the sea and the navy. He was a powerful county magnate, successful and satisfied, and he sat at the head of his table that evening and looked at Sonia with that cruel little smile on his lips, and he was pleased with what he saw, but he did not betray his pleasure. He did not show, as he sometimes did with a new woman, that he was attracted. He was very careful, not because of Maggie, but because of Flossie Milbanks. Flossie was watching. She was the lady of the moment and had a nasty temper.

We played bridge after dinner, most of us, not Sonia; she didn't play cards. So Maggie and Jock and another man sat with her by the fire in the library. I was at Buck's table with Flossie and Reggie Brown in the middle drawing-room, and I could see Sonia through the open doorway. She looked serenely lovely in the lamplight, with a long thin arm on the back of the couch, her curly head resting on one of her beautiful hands and a slender foot held to the glowing coals. Everything was serene in the quiet rooms. Jock's

rough, nasal drawl could be heard telling the story of a race. Sonia's light, soft voice was audible occasionally. Buck paid no apparent attention to it. He was apparently occupied with Flossie under and above the card table. I remember how sharp and hard and badly dressed Flossie looked in a red spangled frock.

"Sonia makes us all look hags and frumps," I said, dealing the cards.

Buck gave a little start. "What's that?"

"Clothes," I said. "We don't bother enough about them."

Flossie looked me up and down.

"I should say you bothered quite enough, Caroline." She jerked her head towards the next room. "I suppose that black thing she's wearing is what you'd call a subtle creation. Think of the time she must spend. Well, I've not got the time. Clothes are a bore, besides, they don't matter down here. Who cares what we put on? I've worn this red thing all winter; Buck's not even noticed it."

"You're wrong there, I think you look ripping in red. That's my favourite frock." He laughed. She laughed. His face was flushed, so was hers. He'd had a good deal of champagne and his usual two glasses of port and two liqueur brandies. We'd all had just enough drink to make us feel cheerfully relaxed. Everything in us was relaxed, even our sense of decency. Buck, fumbling for

Flossie's foot, stepped on mine just then.

Maggie was the only one of our lot who never drank anything, but Sonia, too, I noticed, drank only water that evening. They were the two completely sober people in the party, and I think of them now, sitting together and looking with steady eyes through the doorway at our bridge table, where Buck sat with his powerful torso stuffed into his tight pink coat, his jowl dug into his collar and a dark secret smile hidden behind the red mask of his features. To me his face looked brutal and congested. Really, he did himself too well. Soon he would have purple lines on his nose.

I wonder how he looked to them. I suppose Maggie saw him as she had first seen him. As for the group, both she and Sonia must have had a sharper impression of it than we had, since their heads were clear. But of course each saw something quite different from the other, and neither saw it whole, with its irrevocable past and inevitable future; yet all the elements of its final denouement were there. The force that was going to be exerted upon Maggie till she let go the rope holding her to Buck had already begun to work. Sonia and Buck had signalled to each other, unobserved by us, and Reggie, the stunted little ape man, was going his round that would bring him inevitably, after he'd finished with the other women, to Maggie, just when the rope snapped.

He hadn't yet looked at Maggie and Maggie had not yet looked at him, the ugly brute, but she was going to. Nothing, I suppose, could have stopped her, once Sonia had arrived.

It's strange to think of us all immersed in that moment with only the tips of ourselves showing above its smooth surface. The conscious part of each one of us was floating on the film of appearance, as the leaves of water-lilies float exposed to the air. The other, the dark, hidden self went down, how deep did it go into the well of the invisible past? In what depth were they growing, those roots of ours? Everything that every one of us had done, seen, known or longed for was under us and the obscure blood inheritance of each one of us and the ancestral background. California lay down there under me and the Indian camp of my ancestors, who had probably come out of Mexico, and the Scandinavian landscape of that cold child-woman, my mother. The sierras were there and the dry, sharp, scented pine forests where fires raged, and the prairies and the melancholy Pacific. And so it was with each one of us as we sat at the bridge tables, our blind, silly eyes intent on bits of white cardboard; sat immersed in darkness, on chairs that seemed secure, at tables that appeared solid, in a house that was so still that the candle flames did not flicker; but a house that was, nevertheless, being whirled through space like a flaring comet.

I remember a special instant's hush. Remember looking up, startled by the queer silence, to see Maggie's face across the golden, smoky haze of the drawing-room, hanging in space, livid as a death mask, with its great eyes burning through eyelids half closed in inexpressible weariness. Did I really see her? Was it a trick of the hangings in the doorway that cut her head from her body? Had she really got up and come to the door to watch us, or was it a vision? I don't know. I only know that her face seemed to hang on the air before me, separate, unsupported and naked. There was no veil over the eyes or lips and sorrow was what I saw on it. It was the thin, damp, exhausted face of a woman whose heart was breaking, and I stared at it till it vanished and the queer stillness ended. I heard the soft thud of coal settling in the grate behind me, a second later the small silvery chime of a clock somewhere struck midnight, the sound of Maggie's laugh came from the next room, and Buck said to me: "You're the winner, Caroline. I owe you three pounds ten," and he pushed back his chair and went through to where Sonia and Maggie were sitting.

Had Maggie had a warning? Had some sure deep instinct sounded in her a soundless alarm? Was it a realisation of the truth that had brought her a moment before to the door? If it was, she'd lost the sense of it again by the time I followed

Buck into the library. It was all covered up under the thick layers of her habitual surface thoughts, just as the true expression I'd seen on her face was covered up. She had become again an automaton, a jerky marionette with an abrupt laugh and a hoarse, quick voice, whose big, defiant eyes turned mechanically to look in the wrong direction for danger.

Poor Maggie! Being sober was undoubtedly helpful to Sonia, but it didn't do Maggie any good. She was concentrating on Flossie Milbanks that night, wondering whether it was worth while making a row in that quarter, and she decided, while Buck stood watching Sonia over his glass of whisky, that it wasn't. Flossie wasn't attractive enough to bother about; she wasn't dangerous, Maggie decided; she was merely humiliating. The Flossie affair was just another of the kind that made her feel tired.

She was obviously tired to death when she said good night to us, but her manner to Flossie was breezy and very pleasantly friendly to Sonia. Sonia's manner was perfect, too. It had been all evening, it was a very complete manner. She had appeared slightly bored and rather shy; she hadn't talked much; she had seemed to realise that she was rather out of it, in our intimate group, and not to mind. My manners were good, too. Indeed, we all behaved perfectly, all said good night sweetly, Flossie said, "Good night,

my pet," to Maggie, "Good night, old thing," to Buck, "Come on, Bibs," to her husband, and Buck came out to the hall with us and helped Sonia into her ermine coat with a perfect, formal courtesy, and we went home together, Jock and Sonia and I, in perfect friendliness, and a month later it was finished. Sonia, that is, polished off Jock, rooked him for twenty thousand and made it impossible for us to go on together any longer, he and I, with our strange, intense, discordant make-believe of a marriage.

I say that Sonia got the twenty thousand. I believe that he did give her the cheque. I know they went to Monte Carlo together; I know they both stayed at the *Hôtel de Paris*, and I know they were together every night in the Sporting Club, and when I rushed up to London to see my banker, I had no slightest doubt of what had happened. Jock's wire was a shock, but the shock contained no element of surprise. I realised at once, instantly, that this very thing had been bound to happen. I had been expecting it. Then why did my hand shake so as I read the words on the flimsy paper, and why did I have to sit down suddenly on the stairs? I was alone, luckily. I'd taken the envelope from the telegraph boy at the door myself. He'd gone off on his bicycle.

"Drew cheque on London account yesterday for twenty thousand pounds to pay debt of

honour. Please see bank manager and do the necessary. All up with me now, I know. Am off. Many regrets. Jock."

I remember what I did. My first act, when I got to my feet again, was to bolt the front door. Then I went upstairs, locked Jock's bedroom and put the key in my pocket. Then I went into my bathroom and was violently sick.

Why did I lock the front door? I don't know. I unlocked it again half an hour later. Instinct to hide, I suppose; animal instinct to take cover. I kept saying to myself, "No one must know about this," and quite forgot that the post-mistress must have taken down the telegram, and I behaved in London, when I got there, as if the police were after me. Instead of going to my own house in town, I put up at the Midland Hotel next the station, signed my name C. Merryweather in the register and took the Underground, instead of a cab, to the bank. I wore a thickish veil, too, and kept ducking my head to avoid looking people in the face.

It wouldn't be easy, I knew, to find the money, just like that, all in a moment. My securities were all in America. My property, safely tied up by my father, was administered in California by my cousins, and they were already exasperated by the inroads I'd made on my capital. Jock and I had been living far beyond our income. The houses we'd bought had involved not only a very

large original outlay, but were a continual drain on our yearly budget, much heavier than either of us had anticipated. I thought, on my way up to town, of all the servants, caretakers, bailiffs, gillies, grooms and gardeners whose wages were due the first of the month; I thought of my gloomy, disapproving solicitor and my harassed secretary; I had a bare three thousand that I could lay my hands on in London.

The preposterous cheque had not yet been presented when I got to the bank. The manager did not at first understand. When he understood, he was incredulous. Finally convinced that the cheque was coming through, he became wooden. He was obviously very much shocked. I fancied he was more than a little suspicious. I got angry. This didn't help matters. I told him that I was cabling San Francisco, that my trustees would wire the necessary funds next day. I supposed he was worried by the magnitude of the amount, for he hinted that it would be a help to him if someone, some friend of mine, of unquestionable financial standing, would guarantee my husband's solvency. I thought of Hugo. I could think of no one else. I hesitated an instant, his name on my lips, then dismissed the idea of appealing to him. I said angrily to the stiff old man in the swivel chair that I myself guaranteed my husband's overdraft, that really there was no need to make such a fuss over a mere twenty

thousand pounds. He could ask the American Consul for information about the financial status of the Merryweather family. If he doubted it—I swaggered, I became vulgar, I suggested that a few thousand shares in a copper mine and a few thousand miles of railway on the Pacific coast ought to be enough security, but that if he doubted my title to these, I would telephone my maid to bring up my jewels from the country, or I'd give him a bill of sale on my place in Scotland.

He cut short my tirade with a faint cough, a very slight gesture of deprecation. He cleared his throat and explained to me that he knew all about my American connections, that he didn't for a moment doubt—that I was quite mistaken in taking offence. But the fact was that Mr. Bailey had been constantly overdrawing his account. He had wanted for some time to see me. His position was a delicate one. He was merely a banker, not a legal adviser. He could not even claim the privilege of a friend. He had felt tempted to transgress the limits of propriety more than once.

What it came to was that the poor man knew a deal more about Jock than I did and couldn't find a way of telling me. Jock had been speculating. It came out later that he hadn't dared try to pass off the money he had already spent on Sonia as a gambling debt, so he had plunged on the Stock Exchange. His banker had got wind of

one or two very shady little affairs in the city in which Jock had been involved, and he would have liked to warn me. He tried to. His sense of decency, his incorrigible correctness and my temper stopped him. He merely hinted and I mistook the meaning of his hint. I felt hideously humiliated and went off in raging confusion.

It was all right, of course, about the cheque. Sonia gave me time. She gave me three days. The money was there when it came through for payment. It didn't bear her signature. It was presented by the Crédit Lyonnais. I never had any actual proof that it was she who got the money.

I have put down on this paper that I know Jock gave her the cheque. But I don't know for certain, even now. I don't know any more now than I did then. I am convinced and I was convinced at the time, but at moments I am aware of a sickening doubt. What if I was wrong? What if Jock spoke the truth when he denied it? If he was speaking the truth, the facts are inexplicable. He was mad for Sonia; he'd been after her for months; when she left us, he'd rushed after her to Paris; he was with her every minute in Monte; they had their meals together and occupied adjoining rooms; she left him the day after he signed the cheque and never saw him again.

These are facts; and Sonia's calculating mind is a fact. But the facts haunt me now, they are

only of interest to me now, because of that slight sickening doubt of their validity. I am certain of her relations with Buck. I know, indisputably, and exactly what she and Buck did to Maggie, but about Jock's cheque I may have been mistaken, and if I was mistaken about that, then I am bound to doubt the validity of every fact concerning my married life.

CHAPTER III

I STAYED for a week in the Railway Hotel and spoke to no one. I was trying, I believe, to think. I didn't succeed. The process of thinking was beyond me. I could only walk, and I did walk. I walked the floor of my hotel bedroom, and I walked the streets of North London. I walked up the Tottenham Court Road and back again. I walked along the tram lines to Golders Green. I walked through Highgate and Hampstead and out to Mill Hill. I walked till I was too tired to walk any more and dropped on to my bed, cold and aching, but I'd no sooner been stretched on my back than I'd begin again, not to think, but to imagine, wonder, search, pry, question. A futile, ignoble, incredibly hurting curiosity obsessed me. I wanted to understand, precisely, know exactly all the details, gauge just how much he had hated me and loved her, and find out just why, when and where I had failed to be his friend.

“But you know, idiot, how he felt. He loved her to the tune of twenty thousand pounds. A week with her was worth twenty thousand pounds to him. As for you, you counted for nothing—you only figured as the banker.” I'd say this to

myself aloud. I said it often enough to remember now the sound of the words, and then I'd go off into a wild fit of laughing, and I recall that old sound, too.

It was after a week of this that I ran into Tawaska at the door of the hotel. He wasn't surprised to see me. He asked me where I was going. "For a walk," I said. "Where shall we go?" he said.

"Hampstead Heath's as good as any other place in the rain," I said. So we took a bus and walked on Hampstead Heath in the rain and I told him what had happened. He didn't seem interested. When I ended, he remarked indifferently, "So that's finished. You'll divorce him now," and I said "Yes." And everything seemed all at once quite easy, so easy that I, too, ceased to be interested in Jock Bailey or Sonia, and then we went together to a grubby restaurant in Holborn and had dinner, and I talked all through the meal about a little boy called David Dawson, whom I loved.

I described the nursery wing at Buckhaven Park. I explained that it wasn't a set of big, bare, windy rooms, but a separate country, with a climate of its own, a Government that vaguely resembled that of Sparta and a race as enigmatic and aloof as the inhabitants of Mars. The entrance to it was guarded, I told him, by a sentinel in a starched apron and bonnet, who

held herself like a guardsman. She was the head of the Government as well as the watch-dog of the citadel. She had been invested with absolute authority and she maintained military discipline. Her commands rang out like bugles. The justice and wisdom of her laws were not questioned. They were elementary and perfectly adequate: a digest of the Code Napoléon, the Ten Commandments and a couple of treatises on hygiene. The small citizens of her republic knew that her moral teaching was true. When it was laid down that a sneak, a coward and a liar were a disgrace to any community, they recognised that it was so.

I described Nurse Moore to Tawaska, and I can see her now, as I described her, standing in the schoolroom door that communicated with the night nursery, on a wet winter evening. She holds her knitting in her hands and she surveys the bedlam before her with tranquil eyes and the suggestion of a smile on her strong lips. In two minutes by the clock it will stop, she will stop it. But these two minutes belong to the boys by right, are theirs for waging war by sea and by land, for hunting tigers in jungles or bears in the mountains, for scalping their enemies, or building bridges over roaring chasms, or sending train-loads of innocent passengers crashing from those bridges into those chasms to destruction. The din is considerable. It rises and subsides with the rhythm of breakers on a beach. The disorder

suggests an earthquake. Armies are advancing across the linoleum battlefields, mounted red-coats in serried ranks, battalions of Highlanders, half the Cavalry Regiments of the British Army are engaged in manœuvres as complicated as any Wellington planned at Waterloo. They are advancing against the Turks and the Saracens who wield flashing swords above turbaned heads and a thousand, it seems a thousand, tiny horses are galloping, are rushing together. The shock will be terrible when these armies meet under the table. Beyond the schoolroom piano the Crusaders are starting off for the Holy Land with red crosses on their burnished shields, and a fort is being besieged in some unknown territory the other side of a range of macintosh mountains. It is David who is the Commander-in-Chief of these Armies; Archie and Jeremy have made a tent out of a walking-stick and rugs and have been cooking a mess of pebbles in a pot over an imaginary bonfire. They are now on the war-path. Small John is lying on the floor on his fat stomach enticing a tortoise to come out from under the sofa. They leap over him with blood-curdling yells, become enemies suddenly and rush upon each other with wild ferocity. There's a crash, a chair goes over; puppies bark, yelp, the parrot screams, "Hi, there, man overboard," and Nannie's quiet voice says: "It's six o'clock."

To enter this world you had to assume a new identity. To be a real person, you had to become an Indian or a cowboy or the Captain of a pirate ship. If you remained yourself you stayed outside in the bleak, distant country of ladies and gentlemen and were no more noticed, when you stood by the schoolroom fire, than a ghost or a piece of furniture. Maggie made a very good pirate and an excellent drum-major. She got across the frontier. Buck didn't attempt to. His time with his sons was spent in teaching them to ride, box and play cricket. They were no more comprehensible to him when they were concentrated on the serious business of experimenting in life, called play, than the white mice who lived in a series of starch boxes or the lizards that fell slap on to the schoolroom tea-table from the ceiling.

Tortoise, lizard, or small boy, why should any of them have been interested in a great lump of a human being like Buck Dawson or a woman like myself? They weren't. They ignored us. They knew nothing about us, and didn't want to know anything. Their curiosity was enormous, but it didn't busy itself with our doings. If David hadn't got bronchitis badly, two winters running, if he and I hadn't had those seasons alone together in Switzerland, he would never have thought of me as a friend. He asked me, I suppose, at one time and another, at least half

a thousand questions, but not one of them was about myself or his father or mother. All the queries were about external, astounding, impersonal things; steamships and battleships, submarines and aeroplanes and motor-cars; guns and gunpowder; or about the olden days and the heroes of old; Nelson and the Iron Duke, Drake, Napoleon and Robert Bruce—he could never hear enough about them. But women did not interest him and only men long dead. Distant countries, however, had a great fascination, and maps; the North and South Poles especially.

He wanted to know just exactly how cold it was at the North Pole. Was it as cold as the inside of a refrigerator? and what was the biggest ship afloat, and what was the fastest ship, and what was the speed of the fastest ship in the world? Stars were interesting, too, because of their size and distance. The question of size was continually to the fore. He would come back to the size of Betelgeuse, the biggest of all the stars, again and again and stare with blue eyes, intensely dark and shiny under frowning, puzzled brows, trying to conceive the inconceivable. Size, distance, proportion, relative power and weight; these were the problems he put to me, the same kind of question that Professor Eddington puts to the mind of the world. And his purpose, like Eddington's, was to discern the structure of the Universe, though his questions

were not put quite in the same way.

“How much does that house weigh, Aunt Lina?” “How much would you think all the horses in the street weigh, a hundred tons?” He would look at me, doubtful as to whether he hadn’t overshot the mark, and if I said, “Oh! more than that,” he would flush a little and square his round jaw, and say, “How much more; a hundred tons, a million, do you think?” and he would wait for my answer as if it were of the utmost importance, as if something of tremendous significance hung in the balance. And if finally I said, with assumed carelessness, “Oh yes, at least a million!” his face would grow scarlet with pleasure, would take on a positively triumphant look, for he was greatly impressed by bigness and loved using big numbers. The words “a thousand million” filled him with deep satisfaction. To count in billions made him feel immense, a part of a very big concern.

He had made up his mind about the world when he was six. He knew that it was gorgeous. He knew it with such ardour and responded to the fact with such concentrated passion that he could not abide being told that lovely legends were not literal accounts of what had actually happened. And so he began, about this time, to be worried by a distinction between the real and the unreal.

He would ask, at the end of a heroic story:

"Did this happen in the real world?" And if I said no, he was dreadfully disappointed.

Maggie and I had taken the boys to a pantomime at Christmas. It was about Saint George of England. David's face was crimson with excitement during the play; I thought he'd burst a blood vessel; his heart was going like a sledge hammer; when it was over he was speechless. Afterwards his mother said in the car: "The actor who played St. George was good, wasn't he?" I shall never forget David's face. He went dead white, and he said in a tiny voice: "I thought it was the real St. George." Archie hooted with derision. David had a photo, a picture postcard of St. George clutched in his fist. I'd bought it for him on the way out. Suddenly he tore it into bits and threw it out of the window. Then he gave me a raging, furious look of accusal.

"I hate it," he said. "I hate it. You shouldn't have taken me there," and burst into tears.

A boy's positive ignorance—that, I think, was David Dawson's contribution to the world. Youth's vehement protest, its deliberate, wise, intolerant choice, its fiat, edict, final pronouncement, an absolute refusal to know what we knew about life.

I talked of this to Tawaska, and for the first time in my life I felt that he was interested in what I had to tell him; and when I faltered, afraid of boring him, he would ask a question that

made me tell him more, and his eyes had a wistful look in them I had never seen before.

I remember, indeed, very exactly how his big, smooth face changed as I told him about David. Its cold surface disintegrated slightly; lines appeared on it, strangely enough, lines that made him look old and very tired; marks of suffering. It was as if my talk about David Dawson brought some vulnerable, infinitely gentle thing in Tawaska to the surface. I realised for the first time that he was a very lonely man, and that, for all his strange power, he was not a super being, but just a man. I wondered, deeply moved by his face, what dreadful things he had endured in his loneliness. I saw him laughed at, jeered at, spat upon; saw him lying sick and unattended in a sordid room. I knew that the task he had set himself allowed him no rest and no relief. It was, in its very essence, a relentless task. That was the point. It was a part of what he was doing, to live without relaxation, without sympathy and without a refuge. There was no romance in it. It was no quest for a Holy Grail. There would be no prize at the end. I imagined him, sitting in a stiff chair too small for his bulk, in a mean lodging under a sputtering gas-jet, with a battered book in his hand, or without a book. How many evenings had he spent like that or in trudging dismal streets? He wouldn't notice, perhaps. Perhaps it was all the same to him

where he was, rolling his bulk through the crowded bazaars of Peking, or sitting with me in High Holborn; walking across Asia or across Piccadilly. Perhaps it was the same thing, because it was nothing. Suppose the world had actually became an empty desert to him; I shuddered; had a sense of icy wind blowing over a frozen waste, watched him go across it, solitary, homeless, indefatigably pursuing an objective that he knew he would never attain.

I had little knowledge of what acts and exercises, physical or mental, were involved in the required effort. I only knew that they had to be unpleasant to be of any value, and so I saw him submitting his great body to inconceivable tests of endurance; depriving it of the food it craved and the drink and the sleep, worrying it, exasperating it, exhausting it and deliberately carefully, measuring its exhaustion. He would be watching its clumsy staggering as he drove it on. "Tremble, carcasse!" Henri Trois said once. Tawaska said it countless times. But he allowed no trembling. He controlled the brute. And what did he hope to gain by it all? "Nothing," he had said to me, "nothing of any consequence. It is too difficult. I do not expect to accomplish anything."

But the strangest thing of all about that evening is that now, when I recall our meal in the ugly London restaurant, I see three of us at

the table by the big rain-streaked window.

Tawaska and I sit there, with David Dawson between us. David is smart in grey flannels, he has on his school tie, his hair is brushed sleek; his hat hangs on the back of his chair. He is sitting with his back to the window and his smooth golden head is silhouetted against the grey light of the wet London evening. His face is round and rosy, he is solemnly interested in his food. He chooses with his usual lack of imagination, a vanilla ice and a piece of currant cake, as a sweet, and he occasionally looks from one of us to the other with a friendly gleam of mild interest.

He wasn't there, but I see him there. This scene that never occurred, is one of my most positive memories. He and Tawaska and I never met together. Tawaska only knew David through me. He had never seen him when he called on him in his Oxford rooms that day five years ago. But I see the three of us together in many places. In Switzerland, for instance. I remember the three of us ski-ing, remember the Finn's huge bulk followed by David's tiny comical figure shooting down the smooth white slopes below me. It didn't happen. I know quite well that it didn't happen, and yet I remember it. It comes back to me as something that did really occur.

Tawaska seemed dreadfully tired when we got back to the hotel that night. Before he left me, he said:

"The little boy is very important. He is more important to you than anyone. I think he will look after you." Then he smiled, with that wistful look in his eyes and said good night. As I went up in the lift, I caught a last glimpse of his face.

He was gone when I asked for him next morning. I had assumed that I would see him again. I had gone to sleep thinking of his ravaged face, the new gentleness and the loneliness in his queer eyes; I had imagined there was an appeal in his look addressed to me, and I had slept quietly because I was convinced that he would let me go away with him now. I thought: "Now I know what it is; I must always have loved him, perhaps even before I was born. There is a bond binding us together that is final; an understanding deeper than life, or anything I've learned in life. Happily he needs me with one small part of him, because he is, after all, in one way, just a solitary, helpless man and a child, like all men. That is enough for me. I will look after him, cook for him, mend his clothes, pitch a tent somewhere that he can come to when he is tired. Yes, he will let me go with him now."

I was mistaken. He had gone away, leaving no message, no address—nothing, and I laughed wildly, horribly. I laughed and laughed at myself. I went back to Hampstead, where I'd been for a walk and roared with laughter. I can hear

myself laughing in the dreary, much-trodden glades of that man-ridden Heath and I remember it as the ugliest afternoon I ever spent.

I was certain afterwards that I'd lost him for ever this time, and I was mistaken in that, too. He turned up again when Jock was caught out in his presposterous swindle and clapped into gaol. He found me, surrounded by solicitors and stenographers, in a hotel sitting-room, littered with papers. I had sent for my solicitor, determined to work out, on my own, some line of defence for Jock; and since there was none, since Jock was bound to plead guilty and go to prison, I was in a great state of nerves. I dismissed everybody when Tawaska was announced, and turned on him. I had been nursing a grievance against him, had felt that I had some claim on him and that he had failed me. I said:

“ You abandoned me when I was going through all that difficult, sordid business of the divorce. Now that I’m in a much worse fix, with my husband in prison, you come back. Why? Do my troubles amuse you, or what?”

His face remained passive. He seemed quite indifferent to my anger or quite unaware of it.

“ What are you doing?” he asked, looking round the room.

“ I’ve been trying to work out a line of defence to submit to counsel. These solicitors are all fools. You have to do everything yourself.”

"But how does it concern you?" he asked in his small soft voice.

"How does it concern me? Good God, Tawaska, the man is my husband and he'll get, they say, five years."

"You are not divorced, then?"

"Divorced? No. I'd only just begun divorce proceedings. Now I've dropped that, naturally."

"Why naturally? I do not understand."

"But I couldn't possibly divorce Jock now, while he's in prison!"

He was silent for a moment; then that awful lassitude came over his face.

"I see," he said, and got up.

"Do you mean to say you expected me to go on with the divorce now," I yelled, "when my husband's doing time?"

"I expected nothing," he said, in a dreadful, bored voice, and moved to the door.

I felt as if a hand, perhaps his own enormous one, had got me by the throat. At last I managed to force the ugly words out;

"So you chuck me."

"I can do nothing for you," he said. He opened the door, stood, enormous, for a moment in the doorway.

"I hate you for this, Tawaska," I said. He went out. The door closed behind him. I seemed to be chained to my chair. I struggled, as if trying to get out of a net. Finally, I leapt

across the room, but when I got to the door and flung it open he was nowhere to be seen. I didn't see him again for fifteen years. It was a year afterwards that I had the one letter from him that I've quoted, saying that he did not care for me in any human sense, but that he was bound to me in some way that was indissoluble, and I said, when I read it, "What's the good of that? He's sick of me, that's all. He's given me up as hopeless; but he can't leave me alone. All this stuff about the time being wrong is nonsense." But I kept the letter and read it until I knew it by heart.

I was certain that he was wrong about the divorce. It was impossible to go on with the divorce when Jock went to prison; Maggie agreed; Hugo agreed; everyone agreed.

Now I don't think so. It would have been better for both of us if the divorce had gone through. I can see now that if Jock had been free of me when he came out of Parkhurst he would have done differently. I don't know what he would have done or where he would have gone, but he wouldn't have gone, at any rate, to the ranch and drunk himself to death in the company of a Mexican half-breed girl. It is even possible that had the legal ties binding us been cut quickly, he would never have forged the cheque and gone to prison. That was nerves, panic produced by suspense and bewilderment and suspicion. He

didn't understand legal talk, didn't take in what the solicitors said to him, didn't believe I was going to provide for him. Actually, he was afraid he was going to starve. Literally, he saw himself as the tramp, sleeping in a ditch, who had always haunted him. Feeling himself already an outcast, he tried to bluff it out, but something in him snapped; he lost his nerve and his power to reason.

Reasoning had never been his strong point. He had never been taught to think; he couldn't grasp abstract ideas; he was superstitious; he believed in luck, and his luck was out. What he had feared had happened. Money, that was the magic thing. He had had it; now it was gone; he had none. But he had an old cheque-book of Bill Moffat's. I don't know how he came by it. Perhaps, by accident. He said, under oath, that he couldn't remember taking it away with him. In any case, he had it and I can imagine him sitting in his room over the bar of the Rutland Arms, looking at it with red eyes, distractred, befuddled, wild with rage and resentment and sick with fright, and suddenly signing Bill Moffat's name, as he had seen Bill Moffat himself do, countless times. But it was a bad forgery; pathetically bad. He could scarcely write his own name, much less another man's.

The trouble was that I had been unable to get at him quickly to make arrangements about the

divorce. He had disappeared. It was weeks before we picked up his trail. Sonia left him in March, the seventeenth of March. He went off the same night to an unknown destination. Questioned in Paris by my representative, she disclaimed any knowledge of his whereabouts, and I imagine she was telling the truth, for it was she, in the end, who put us on to him. She sent me word late in April that she'd had a letter from him posted in Algiers, and that he'd given Poste Restante, Tunis, as an address. She added that she had no intention of answering his letter, but that if I were anxious to find him, this indication might be of use to me. It was.

The detective Hugo advised me to employ picked up his trail in Tunis, followed it back to Gib. and along the Mediterranean to Greece, he'd gone there by tramp steamer; lost it in Genoa, picked it up again in Naples, doubled back to Trieste, hunted him down the Greek Archipelago, and finally ran him to earth in a café in Constantinople in June.

Awful? Of course it was awful, that man hunt. If I'd known how frightened he was. If I'd realised his insane terror. He thought, it seems, that I'd put the police on him because of the cheque he'd given Sonia. He thought he was already a thief, in the eyes of the law. When he found I only wanted to serve divorce papers on him, he laughed until he was sick. The detective

told me how he laughed and laughed. His relief was so great that he came swaggering back, appeared all of a sudden at Newmarket, complete with top hat, patent leather boots, diamond scarf pin and flashy lady, and dropped a couple of hundred during the afternoon.

Maggie was at the race meeting and saw him. It was she who told me. "He looked pretty ghastly," she said.

"How ghastly?"

"Shaky, as if he'd been drinking too much, and awfully low, somehow. It was the way he wore his hat over one eye, and the way he walked. And the lady, she was pretty bad, too."

"Who was she?"

"I haven't an idea. He'd got her off the streets, I fancy. Why do you wince at that, Lina? What difference does it make to you now?"

"I don't know."

"I believe you still care for him."

"I don't. I hate him."

"Well, then!"

"But I'm afraid he'll get into some new trouble — do something worse."

"You're not responsible for what he does."

"I know, but I feel responsible. I tell you what I feel; I feel guilty; I feel I'm to blame. I asked him to marry me. It was my idea. He would never have thought of it, and I married him

to stop Hugo's fussing. I thought. . ."

"It's no good going over all that. You'll go dippy if you keep on like this."

"It's so difficult to end, even a false relationship. The thing was never a sound concern. It was bound to fail, but I've sunk a good deal more in this marriage than is represented by our exhausted bank account."

"You must cut your losses and forget about it."

"I know. I want to. I'm getting rid of everything as quickly as I can. I've had an offer for the villa; none yet for the place in Scotland. I'd like to keep the hunting box, so as to be near you and the boys, but I don't know; I'm not sure. Anyway, none of that worries me. It's Jock. It's a feeling that something more and something worse is going to happen. Something that I ought to be able to prevent. But how can I prevent it? He agrees to the divorce. He seems to want it. He denies the Sonia thing absolutely. He's strangely obstinate about that, but he has provided other evidence, perfectly satisfactory and sufficient. The solicitors say the only thing that worries him is money. He seems to think there's something tricky about my proposals; that I've given my trustees secret instructions of some sort. He's afraid they won't hand over. He's so suspicious that it is very difficult, my solicitor says, to talk to him. He seems to have a very queer idea of the kind of woman I am."

I was to find out more about that quite soon. Indeed, the truth is, and it is the most important thing for me in all this dreadful business, that when I went to see Jock in the cell where he was awaiting his trial, I got from him such a brand new, completely different impression of my own self that when I left him I doubted, quite literally, the existence of any such woman as Caroline Merryweather.

The impression was so strong that I have never been able to efface it, and what made his portrait of myself so convincing was that he was unconscious of drawing it.

He had no wish to talk to me; no desire to impress me.

It had all been too much for him. He wasn't even frightened any more. He was simply broken, helpless and grateful, in a dull way, to me for getting him the best legal advice I could. I've seen sick animals in cages at the Zoo who looked and behaved just like that, and I felt, as I talked to him, that I was merely teasing a suffering beast. But he didn't look at me. He just cowered in a corner and kept his eyes off me and said something, now and then, as if to himself.

"You see, you gambled pretty high yourself. I'd see you losin' pretty big piles, and winnin' sometimes, so I thought I'd do the same." Then, after a pause, "There was so much money spillin' about; nothin' seemed to matter. I was never

any good at figures. I'd never seen so much money in my life." He held his head in his hands and stared at the floor of the cell for a while, then spoke again.

" You could stand more of everything than I could. Your head was better. I'd see you pourin' down the champagne, as cool as a cucumber, when I was half soused already. I'd never met anyone like you before. I'd never had anything to do with women like you. I expect there aren't any others. You used to scare me, sometimes. When you'd come sailin' into a restaurant with your head flashing with diamonds and your eyes glaring and that snarl on your mouth, I'd feel like runnin' for my life. I couldn't keep my end up. How could I? You knew how to handle all those people, head-waiters and princes and millionaires. You knew your way about, I didn't, and I knew you despised me. I'd see you lookin' at me, thinkin' to yourself what a worm I was—being ashamed of me. I'd be so sick, sometimes, I'd feel like chuckin' my hand in. Then you'd suddenly be nice to me, or some other woman would make up to me. I felt better when I had someone to be kind to me, even if she was nothin' but a prostitute. Even trollops can make you feel not quite so lonely for a bit, for a little bit." He gave a soft shuddering sigh, scraped his feet on the floor of the cell, muttered again through his hands.

" I'm glad it's all over. I couldn't have stood

much more swingin' up and down. One day you'd seem to like me all right. Then you'd turn on me like a wild cat. I never knew what to expect."

"Sometimes I'd think you were jealous. Once or twice I thought you'd got fond of me, in a way, but of course I knew why you'd married me, and I knew, if you'd got to love me, you'd not be carryin' on with those dagos. I couldn't say anythin' to that, could I? How could I? You'd made a bargain, hadn't you? And you held the money bags. I had to stick it, or clear out."

"But I didn't, Jock, I never. . ."

He didn't hear my denial of infidelity. He was wrapt in his own, impenetrable trouble.

"I don't know how I came by that cheque book o' Bill Moffat's, or why I put his name on that piece o' paper. Panic, I s'pose. Tell you, I was in a fix again? I didn't dare—— I've always been afraid of you. I've always been afraid, all my life, of everybody. Every time I've seen a tramp lying in a ditch I've said to myself, 'That'll be you, some day, you poor cuss.' Well, that's come true. When I get out of here, if I ever get out, that's where you'll find me."

That was about all Jock said. It was enough. He didn't look up when I left him. I didn't attend the trial. He sent word, asking me not to. Said it would give him the jim-jams if he saw me sitting in the Court. He got five years. I didn't

see him again until he came out. He didn't want to see me.

Hugo didn't understand my feeling about Jock. He had come to me in my trouble. I'd not seen him, to speak to, since my marriage. He was very helpful; gave himself a lot of trouble; spent hours with Counsel going over the case; saw to a hundred and one things; but he took a very cynical view of Jock's actions, and was exasperated by what he called my morbid sentiments, so I gave up trying to explain to him. He had a lot of troubles of his own and he wasn't at all well. He seemed to have aged a great deal. He seemed like the ghost of himself, a very gentle, chivalrous ghost, but nevertheless, a ghost, someone familiar but yet quite strange; someone I could no longer touch by putting out a hand.

King Edward had died in May of that Spring. Mr. Asquith was attacking the powers of the House of Lords. Hugo, the great aristocrat, or one may put it, the modest old man who was too proud to want to defeat the Parliament Bill and bring about the unseemly creation of five hundred new Peers, had determined not to vote against the Government and had brought down upon his head an avalanche of abuse. Almost all his old friends turned on him. I think it killed him. He died the following winter. I saw him once, a few days before he died, in his big London house, but he was too

weak to talk to me much. He could only whisper a little and smile faintly. I remember the ghost of that lovely smile of his, hovering for an instant on his grey lips, in the great, gloomy bedroom. He wasn't in bed. He was in a big chair by the window and it was raining, just as it had rained that afternoon, long ago, when he first came to tea with me in my mother's house in Grosvenor Square. I was thinking of this when he beckoned me to lean closer.

"The boy," he whispered, "maybe, I shall see the boy." I didn't understand. I must have looked bewildered. "Our boy," he said. I nodded, and the tears came streaming down my face suddenly. I had forgotten small John Merryweather, and I knelt and wept with my head on Hugo's old knees, but he did not know why I wept so dreadfully.

CHAPTER IV

“THE idea is to behave well,” I said. “Isn’t that the idea?”

“To behave well. Yes, I suppose that’s it.”

We were sitting in Maggie’s room by the fire, ready for bed. I think it was in September, 1912. I think Jock had gone to Parkhurst some six months before, but I’m not certain of my dates. I only know that I’d come back to see to the closing down of my hunting box. I was giving it up; selling my horses, furniture, saddlery, and so on.

The sound of Maggie’s hoarse voice comes back to me. She spoke monotonously, in a low key, but with a dull, even emphasis. We were thinking about life, and the monotony of our voices seemed to suggest that we didn’t intend to be sentimental about it or sorry for ourselves.

I sat on the hearth rug, on my heels. I was smoking a pipe, a new habit with me that I indulged in privately. Maggie in a diaphanous pink nightdress and pink satin dressing gown trimmed with feathers, lay horizontally across a deep chair. Her head rested on one of its arms, her thin legs hung over the other; she lay, watching

the smoke from her cigarette float toward the ceiling, through half closed eyes. I didn't like looking at her. Her elaborate night attire didn't suit her. The pink made her more sallow, the fluffiness accentuated her hard, stringy thinness. She looked like a battered and exhausted boy, prematurely old, got up for a play as a lady of light virtue. As masquerade it was a failure, and it seemed to me to be a sign of something pitiful and ignoble. It was all for Buck, of course. If she hoped to hold Buck that way, I thought angrily, she must be hard put to it.

I see the room very distinctly. It was not a pretty room, but large and comfortable. A solid, conventional, very English room, such as you'd find in several hundred well-to-do country houses in the Midlands ; gay chintz hangings, some heavy pieces of early Victorian furniture, a large dressing table in the bow window, a desk crammed with papers, a stiff couch, a thick carpet, a good many photographs in frames on tables, and a collection of plates and baddish water colours on the walls that were covered with a white, satin-striped wall paper. Not much sign of Maggie in it. The room reflected simply the Dawsons' idea of a con-nubial bedroom.

The big canopied bed was turned down on both sides. There was a pillow for Buck and one for Maggie. Presently, they would lie side by side in the dark, as they had done for some five

thousand nights. Did he still take his wife in his arms and hold her worn body close? Perhaps she still whispered to him, as lovers do, or perhaps she lay awake while he slept, thinking, wondering, questioning, just as I had done. But it would be worse for Maggie if her husband let her down finally; much worse. It would be worse for her than for almost anyone.

"To behave well." She repeated the phrase again. "It sounds simple, but it isn't."

We were silent for awhile, thinking of our separate difficulties.

"Damn it all," I burst out. "There's nothing for me to behave well about now. It doesn't matter in the least what I do."

"Nonsense, it matters to me, for one. I don't like to see you lose your nerve. I think it's a mistake to give up your little place here. You can live this thing down, if you stick it. The people round here are decent about that sort of thing. They admire you for not making a fuss and for not going on with the divorce. They're bound to think you a good sport. Haven't they been very decent on the whole?"

"They have."

"Well, then?"

"It's too much to ask of them and I won't ask it. I don't want their admiration, or their pity either. A good sport! God help us. It won't do Jock any good, not being divorced. He'll still

be tied to me, when he comes out; that's all. It would have been better for him if I had had the nerve to divorce him. I see that now. I didn't. I couldn't. Why? Because of what they'd say, these people who are trying to be so decent, but are really so uncomfortable when they catch sight of me that they don't know where to look. I know perfectly well when they ask me to lunch that they have to think first, remember who's coming. They wonder if so and so will mind, and they don't ask me much, not when there's anyone from outside. I don't blame them. I think it's quite natural. I think it very courageous of them to ask me to dine at all, even with the governess and the deaf aunt, but I don't like it; I don't accept it; I'm going."

"I wish you wouldn't, Lina."

"Oh, I'm not going far. Only to Paris. Paris is the place for women with shady pasts."

"You'll come and stay with us?"

"When you're alone."

"God, Lina, you do make me sick. Do you think I'd stand for your being made uncomfortable in my house?"

"It's not your house, darling."

"Has Buck been stupid?"

"Not at all. On the contrary, I think he enjoys butting against the prejudices of the snobs."

"Well then."

"I'll come, darling, to see you.

"And David," she added. "You'll not lose sight of him."

"I don't want to."

"If he has to go to Switzerland again, will you take him?"

"If you'll let me."

"Let you?"

"I thought perhaps that now, with a husband doing time——"

"Don't be a fool." Then, after a pause, "What'll you do with your dogs?"

"Chloroform them."

So I moved to Paris just when Sonia moved to England.

It all clicked. She bought four of my horses and moved into my house. I had it on lease from Buck and he took over the lease, then passed it on to her. He saw to everything. I know that her hunters were in their loose boxes when she arrived, the cook in the kitchen, the housekeeper on the front steps in a red wig and black bombazine. He had done just the same thing before.

Maggie wrote: "Would you believe it? That woman is in your house. It makes me sick to pass the gate. She's going to hunt with us this winter and she can't ride at all. You never saw such a performance as she put up yesterday. Well, I hope she gets tired of making a fool of

herself soon. If she expects me to be civil, she's mistaken."

But Sonia didn't get tired. She was the kind to go through fire and water for a man with a large bank account. A few months in the sodden Midlands, surrounded by a lot of rude women and boring men, wouldn't stop her. She was very determined, very intelligent, very adaptable. She didn't bring her atmosphere with her into that hunting country. She left it behind, together with most of her Paris clothes, to be retrieved later.

Maggie didn't mention her again for some weeks, then she wrote, describing, in satirical language, the transformation. "Our foreign beauty isn't foreign any more. She's more English than any hard hunting dame of this country ever was. She's dropped her Russian accent and thrown away her lip stick. When she's off a horse, she wears a tweed skirt and an old grey sweater. Unfortunately for the peace of mind of most of us, she looks much nicer. Ugly clothes suit her. She has a skin like a baby's and her hair curls naturally! Pity!"

Another letter followed quite soon. "I've had a row with Buck about that slut. It seems she complained to him of my being rude. I told him I intended to be. I said he must be mad if he expected me to be decent to her after what she'd let you in for. He declared she'd had nothing to

do with that business ; that it was an outrage to accuse her of having taken the money from Jock. He said she'd never cared a button for Jock, was bored to death with him, and furious when he followed her to Monte. He said she had felt very much the false position Jock's ridiculous behaviour had put her in, *vis à vis* of yourself. He said we were all jealous, that was what was the matter with us. That it wasn't her fault if men lost their heads over her. That she'd suffered quite enough indignity at your hands but, by God, she wasn't going to be treated that way by me if he had anything to say about it. I said he hadn't ; that I'd be as rude as I felt like being, and that was very rude indeed. It was quite a row, and there's still a lot of thunder in the air, as you can imagine."

I had no more letters for a long time after that. And when Maggie did write, she didn't mention Sonia.

I went south in January. David got bronchitis again, and early in February I came back, in answer to a letter from Maggie, to take him to Switzerland.

"He's so skinny," she wrote, "and he can't get rid of his cough. The doctor says there's nothing else for it. Buck's furious. He seems to take it as a personal injury that a son of his should be puny. And David feels almost the same. He thinks it an awful disgrace, poor little chap.

Nanny says he's got nerves about it. Buck says nonsense, that a boy of seven can't have nerves. Anyhow, he's got to go, so if you'd really like to go with him, he's yours. If you don't, I can send a governess or somebody."

I went, of course. I'd picked up a languid young man and taken him to the south of France, but I left him. He didn't understand how I could leave him, just like that, to go off so gaily and act as nursemaid to a sick child. He was annoyed because I was so pleased. His name was Henry. He wasn't a bad sort, but stupid, a Frenchified American; a musician, of sorts. He had a studio in Paris. He had the emotional instability and the childish helplessness of the artist. I couldn't tell him that had he been ten times more attractive I'd have dropped him instantly to keep an appointment with David. So I didn't explain. I just left and wired Maggie that I was arriving and would go to the Ritz. Maggie wired back that they'd meet me in London and bring David with them, ready to start for Switzerland.

And now, strangely, with a hurting and very exceptional poignancy, the little agony of that last evening in London comes back to me. Instead of fading, the emotional pain of that night has deepened. I suppose this is because it flows into the dread recollection of David's later experience, and I feel it all now, with full knowledge of

what was then coming—and unknown.

The Buckhavens had a house in town at that time, north of the Park. David and I were leaving the next morning by the eleven o'clock from Victoria, and I was to go to Maggie at six to fix up final details. I was late. It was a quarter past when I asked the man at the door of the hotel to get me a taxi, and while I stood waiting, a car passed with Sonia and Buck inside. They were so intent on what they were saying to each other that, though they passed quite close, they didn't see me. Buck was scowling; Sonia looked grim. I had an impression that some weighty and difficult problem was being discussed between them, and it flashed on me that the problem must concern Maggie.

Should I tell her? Should I warn her? Was it any of my business? She had never talked to me about her difficulties with Buck. Did this provide a reason for breaking through her reserve?

It was a little after the half hour when I got to the house near Hyde Park Gardens, and the man-servant who opened the door told me her Ladyship had gone out. "But she expected me," I said. "Didn't she leave a message?"

"No, madam."

I didn't know what to do, and I was standing in the front hall, wondering whether I'd wait, when David came rushing headlong down the stairs, his face white as wax, his eyes enormous

with a tragic apprehension. He was struggling into his coat. His expression didn't change when he saw me, and he made straight past me for the open door.

"David," I shouted. I shouted his name because I felt he wouldn't have heard otherwise. "David! Stop! Where are you going?"

He stopped. He threw me a wild look of appeal. He seemed demented. I saw that he was shaking. "She's gone," he gasped.

"Who's gone?"

"Mum. She's gone without saying good night to me. She's just gone. I was waiting. I heard the door bang. She can't be far." He made again for the door.

Laughable? Did I want to laugh? I did not. The panic of a small, nervous boy is no more laughable than that of a man hunted by the police.

David was out in the street by this time. I made after him and grabbed him by the hand. He pulled me down the street. I could feel the quivering of his body, hear his quick, struggling breath.

"Hurry," he said. "Hurry. She can't be far. She's gone to see a friend. She said she was going, but she promised, you see, she promised to say good night to me first." His high thin treble quivered, squeaked like a fiddle. He pulled; I pulled back. It was dark. Night had fallen. But

the street lamps stretching away to right and left showed us that the street was empty. There was no woman's figure anywhere to be seen.

"Come," panted David. "Come. We must find her. We'll find her if we hurry."

"But what friend was it, David? What was her name? Which way did she go?"

"I don't know. But she can't be far. If we run, we'll catch up with her. Come, Aunt Lina, come quick. Oh, do help me."

I was shaking myself by this time. I let him drag me along. I said again: "But we don't know which way she went, David."

"I think she went this way," he said, "she usually does," and he dragged me down the street. He'd come out without his hat. His head shone faintly as he hurried along in the dim light. He came about up to my waist. His short legs moved quickly beneath his dark blue jacket. He hurried on, panting for breath and struggling to control himself, down the dark street between the tall houses. Other streets to right and left stretched away, with their lighted lamps, into broken piles of shadow. At the street corner he faltered. There was no Maggie anywhere before us, nor to the right, nor to the left. He gave a single shuddering sob. "You see, she promised," he said in a very small voice.

"But we don't know which way to go, David, and London's a big place. I don't think we'll

find her this way. We'd better go back and ask. I'll ask the servants. I'll find out and telephone her."

He had almost lost hope, but he didn't give in till we got to the Queen's Road and saw Hyde Park spread out before us in the night. Then he realised that it was hopeless and let me take him home. He broke down when he got to his room. He looked at me and said once again, "She promised, you see," and then he sobbed and sobbed in my arms. It was particularly awful for David to cry like that, because he knew boys shouldn't cry or ever show their feelings, and he was ashamed.

I had rather a serious row with Buck and Maggie about it when they came in. Buck said David needed a good smacking. Maggie said: "I don't understand what he made such a fuss about." I tried to explain.

"It was because you promised. He attaches great importance to promises. When you broke your promise, the world shook."

Maggie looked troubled. "I forgot," she said. Buck snorted. Then he shot her a look of sudden suspicion. "Where did you go, by the way?"

"To have a cocktail."

"Who with?"

"That's my business."

They lost interest in David. Maggie went up

and sat with him for a bit, but she was thinking of her own concerns, so she didn't realise, quite, how he was feeling. Perhaps, if I could have made her understand him then, the little tragedy of that evening would not have been prophetic. But I don't suppose David could have saved Maggie; he wasn't important enough to her.

I don't suppose anything can stop the big events that are bearing down on you out of the future. They come on like express trains. They start silently, far back behind you in the past, swing round in a curve and come at you, full on, from the front.

I said to Maggie: "Can't you go with him to Switzerland to-morrow instead of me?"

"Why? Don't you want to go?"

"Of course I do, but it's you he wants."

"I couldn't possibly." She looked harassed. "We've a big party for the Hunt Ball. I've a hundred and one things— Anyway, I couldn't leave Buck."

I said then exactly what I thought. "You're a fool, Maggie. That boy is worth ten of Buck, and he loves you more than Buck ever did."

For a second she went white with anger; her eyes glared into mine, then faltered. "For God's sake clear out of the house, Lina, and leave me alone."

David was composed when I met them at

Victoria Station the next morning. He had complete control of himself. He'd brought a very moth-eaten Teddy bear and a big book about ships for the train, and stood quite still in the crowd on the platform, hugging them, with his brow knit like Napoleon's. He didn't look at Maggie. And when the time came to get into the train, he didn't cling to her or kiss her more than once for good-bye, and though his face was pale, his jaw was stubborn and his soft mouth didn't quiver.

Buck shook hands with him. "Good-bye, old chap."

"Good-bye, Dad."

He hung out of the carriage window and waved to his mother and father and waved and waved till the crowded platform, with their two figures, disappeared suddenly. Then he sat back, frowning, and said nothing for a long time. But we had a jolly time in Mürren, he and I, and he got strong again. I wish that he hadn't.

I don't think it would have made the slightest difference to the result had I told Maggie about seeing Buck and Sonia together in a taxi in Piccadilly. She needed no warning. She saw, quite clearly, what was happening. The only aspect of the business that was hidden from her was what was going to happen in the end. That she had not yet entertained as a possibility. She

had ousted so many women that she very naturally thought Sonia was just one more. That Sonia was exceptional, she recognised, but not that she was going to be the exception, the one who would defeat her. This struggle would be grimmer. Sonia was more beautiful, more determined and more dangerous in a number of ways, but it didn't occur to Maggie as conceivable that Buck would want to put Sonia in her own place. Sonia was dangerous because she was heartless and greedy and shameless. These qualities made her strong, but they seemed to Maggie to be at the same time a guarantee of her own ultimate victory. It might be barren. She might find herself in possession of a battlefield strewn with rubbish. The prospect of a life spent in clearing it up might be unspeakably dreary. She might even come to hate the sight of Buck in his damaged state, but she didn't doubt he'd be there. She never for a moment envisaged life as empty of him. She had you see those fixed notions; she still believed that loyalty had a higher and more durable value than falsity. She was still prejudiced enough to think that truth would win out over lies, that passionate devotion counted more than cold sensuality, and that a man, any man, would, in the end, choose to stick to an old loyal friend rather than leave her for a new, attractive monster.

So she took on Sonia and defied Buck. She

stood up to the two of them and fought, and she used the weapons she had used before. She had a large collection and she used all of them, and they all failed her. She employed the brutal rudeness that had scared away Florrie, the ridicule that had done in Clarissa, the impudence that had made Buck laugh at Helen. It was no good. Nothing was any good. Buck didn't react. She could make no impression on him. When she talked to me about it just before her death, she said that he wasn't himself, and that feeble phrase expressed literally a formidable fact. He wasn't Buck; he was someone else, and the man he had become didn't remember who she was. So whatever she did, he was merely exasperated, as a man would be if a strange woman made him scenes. Maggie, I gathered, made every kind of scene; she wept, she stormed, she was unnaturally silent. "I behaved very foolishly, Lina. I lost my head and made an awful fool of myself. But, you see, I was so very unhappy and frightened. I knew what I did only made things worse, but I couldn't help what I did."

Nothing she did made any difference; nothing she could have done would have made any. Had she been civil to Sonia, Buck would not have been grateful. Had she dared try to make love to him herself as if he were new to her, he would have been disgusted. Had she adopted the attitude of complete indifference that had, at one time, so

got on his nerves that he had dropped the other lady, he would have accepted her indifference with relief and would have gone off calmly to tell Sonia all was serene.

Maggie could make no impression on either of them. Being rude to Sonia was like punching a soft pillow. Sonia never hit back. She smiled sweetly, and sent Buck to Maggie afterwards to do the punishing, and he did it. Maggie had to pay heavily for her snubs to Sonia.

But she took this kind of punishment without flinching. She refused, point blank, to ask Sonia to a meal and so make things easy. The county was seething by this time, mostly with resentment against Sonia and Buck. Maggie was popular, and Buck's behaviour shocked his friends. Buck felt this, so he tried to bully Maggie into giving the whole thing a decent appearance. She refused. But her refusal to have Sonia in the house gained her nothing in the end, for Sonia was always in the house. Her invisible presence filled it. When Maggie stormed at Buck and he laughed, it was Sonia who made him laugh. When she wept, and he told her roughly to stop her noise, it was Sonia's soft voice in his ear that prompted the callous vulgarity. She couldn't get at Buck, couldn't make him hear, or see, or feel anything, because he was never alone. He was always two people; the man who was insanely enamoured of Sonia, and Sonia herself,

the projection of her idea, and the instrument of her will.

It is impossible to understand the power of a woman like Sonia. It is too simple to understand. One simply is obliged to admit it and accept the fact that brute passion, when aroused in a man like Buck Dawson, creates a ravenous hunger that will not tolerate any interference until it is satisfied. I think, had he felt any tenderness for Sonia, that he would have been kinder to Maggie. It was because his feeling for Sonia was black that his behaviour to Maggie was ugly. I think Maggie was right when she explained to me that it wasn't Buck who had wanted to hurt her to death, but Sonia. I remember the convincing clarity of Maggie's exhausted voice as she talked that day, when it was all over and done with, and she had reached the last extremity and no more harm could be done to what had been done for ever. "Buck seemed to hate me," she said. "But it wouldn't have occurred to him if Sonia hadn't been hateful. And he couldn't have thought of the things he said to me or did to me if he had been happy.

"It doesn't sound silly now, because I've no more hope now; now there's nothing, so I'll say that I knew he wasn't happy, and I guess that's why I didn't hand him over to her. It wasn't only jealousy, Lina. I don't think it was only that. You see, I knew Buck, and Sonia had never

seen the Buck I knew."

Certainly, however much Buck might have come to hate Maggie for standing in the way of what he called his happiness, it wasn't in character for him to humiliate her before their friends, be rude to her in front of the children or bring pressure on her by cutting down her allowance. He was, after all, by birth and training, what is called a gentleman. He took himself seriously as the head of a big county family, and he had always had quite definite ideas about what was caddish. It would never have occurred to him as possible, to cut off her allowance, and subsequently question the validity of her household books, had he been in his senses. That, I think, was the thing that broke Maggie. She had begun to lose her nerve before, but at that she lost it completely, and, for the moment, her head with it. She was so rattled the day Buck accused her of putting some of the housekeeping money in her own pocket that she left home, came up to town and wrote to me, asking me to let her have a hundred pounds, as she put it, so that she could pay some bills. But she had repented of this act of self-betrayal by the time she got my cheque. She sent it back to me, said she didn't need it after all, and after a couple of wretched days in London, when she did some grim thinking, she went back to Buckhaven Park to take up the fight again. But not to fight for the same thing. She

had fought for her love first. She began now to fight for her rights, and it was at this stage, when she'd wrenched herself free from all sentiment by an effort of quite extraordinary will power, that Sonia found her a redoubtable opponent.

It had taken Buck and Sonia a year to bring about this situation. I was living in Paris most of the time, and I didn't, of course, understand it then as I do now. Maggie had explained nothing; all I knew was what I saw when I went to stay with her and what people who passed through Paris told me.

I was told that things were going badly with the Buckhavens; that Buck was making an awful fool of himself and that Maggie was taking it very hard. "She's not clever with him, you know," they'd say. "She shows her hand too much, puts all her cards on the table." Flossie Milbanks came to lunch in the Rue de St. Pères with the express purpose of being spiteful. She called it a beastly mess; said Maggie was riding for a bad fall, one of the worst; said she didn't believe Buck was really gone on Sonia; she believed he was simply fed up with Maggie's tantrums, and she, too, said what they all said: "She's not clever enough to hold a man like Buck or deal with a woman like Sonia. If I was up against a fat lump of a woman like that . . ."

I cut her short. "She was clever enough to know how to deal with you," I said.

"Damn it all, Caroline. I must say . . ."

"Oh, for God's sake, Flossie, drop it. I dare say I'm a very rude woman. Well, if you want me to be civil, don't come to me with silly talk about Maggie."

None of this sounds pretty. None of it was. It was ugly.

I found out just how ugly in the spring of 1913. Maggie and Buck had been in the habit of going abroad every April when the hunting was over. She wrote to me that they were not going that year. At any rate, she wasn't. Buck talked of going to Germany. He'd got war with Germany on the brain. She'd be at home, alone probably, with the boys for their Easter holidays. Archie and David would be back from school. Would I come? It would be lovely to see me.

I went, and I found Buck still in the house, but on the point of departure. His luggage was in the hall. I arrived at tea time. Maggie came hurrying to meet me out of a door that she hurriedly closed behind her. She looked very queer. Her manner was furtive and frightened. "We'll have tea upstairs," she said. "Let's have it in the schoolroom," and she hustled me up the stairs. But the boys had finished their tea. They seemed glad to see me in their usual, funny way; jumped up, shook hands, were shy, hadn't anything to say and were obviously, all except

David, longing to be off out of doors. David looked odd, I noticed. He looked a little as Maggie looked, frightened; there was something furtive about him, too. I felt suddenly sick.

Maggie said: "Can you get us a fresh cup of tea, Nanny? We might as well have it, now that we're here. There's masses of bread and butter." She turned to the boys. "But you needn't wait. Be off. We'll join you later."

They went, all except David. "Must I go, Mum?"

"Of course not." Then: "Don't you feel well, David?"

"Oh, I'm *quite* well, *quite*." He said it with anxious emphasis. "But I'd rather stay with you, Mum," and he looked at the door and so did Maggie, both with the same, quick, anxious look.

I knew a moment later why, and I knew why Maggie had hurried me up to the nurseries. She had fled there for protection. It seemed to her the only safe place in the house. She did not think Buck would follow her there and attack her again in front of Nurse Moore and the children. She was wrong.

We heard his heavy rapid step, the thud of his powerful hand on the door. It burst open. He came in with a rush. I've seen bulls come into the arena like that. His long stride landed him in the middle of the room. He stood there, shoulders hanging forward, head down, small blue

eyes looking up under lowering brows, dangerous sparks in them; a powerful, ugly brute, very like a maddened bull.

I have an impression of Maggie gripping the table, of David's pale, frightened face, of Nurse Moore in the background standing like a Guardsman, her knitting in her hand.

Buck spoke to Maggie quickly, biting off his words. "I told you to come to me in my study. I expect my wishes to be obeyed in this house. Either you obey me, or you leave it."

"Buck!" She barely breathed his name, but it sounded, nevertheless, like an agonised cry of warning and of appeal, as it was.

He wheeled on David at the sound of it. "Get out," he said sharply. "I want to talk to your mother. Get out, I tell you," he shouted; "do you hear me?" David hesitated. His face went crimson. I saw his thin knees wobble under him. Then he looked at his mother and stiffened. His trembling stopped. The colour drained from his face. He stood his ground. He was white to the lips now, but he held his head high and his clear soft treble was steady.

"You mustn't, Daddy," was all he said.

They faced each other, the powerful man and the skinny, weak little boy, and for a moment Buck looked into the eyes of his son; they held a fearless, penetrating sweetness. I think Buck wavered. I think everything hung for an instant

in the balance; Maggie's life and his own and David's own—all that heaviness hung on the fine, fragile look that came from the boy.

It snapped. Buck snapped it. "Take him away, Nurse." He roared. "Do what I tell you." The rest is dreadful confusion. I remember David struggling, being dragged sobbing from the room; remember his voice coming through the door, "Oh, don't. Oh, don't do it, don't. Let me go, let me go," and then I found Maggie had fainted. She lay senseless on the floor with Buck standing over her. He did nothing about her. He gave one ugly look at the heap lying at his feet on the green linoleum, turned and walked out. He had left the house by the time I got her to bed.

I stayed on for a fortnight, but I never went back to Buckhaven Park again. I don't know what became of the white mice or the tame tortoise, or how Archie got on with his stamp collection, or what was done with David's soldiers. They were a battered army, anyhow. Many had lost their swords, some their heads. Quite a lot of Saracens were galloping headless through the world. Broken brown teapots that stand in schoolroom cupboards are thrown away; so are broken toys. But what becomes of them? A man comes with a wagon to cart away rubbish. The wagon rattles down the road. Where does it go, I wonder?

I only saw David once during the following winter, 1913-14. I went down to see him at his school. He seemed well. That was the time when he came hurrying in from the cricket field in his loose cricket clothes, his shirt open at the throat, all warm and moist and rosy, looking like a very young Sun God.

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CHAPTER V

Buck had been trying to wring out of Maggie a promise that she would divorce him. He had used, I fancy, judging by the scene in the school-room, pretty much every kind of pressure, everything except physical violence. He didn't use that. I almost wish he had. If he had knocked her down, she would have walked out of the house, as she'd done once before with another husband, and it might have been better. She wouldn't have ended, in any case, as she did. There was something in her, stubborn and final, that asserted itself in the presence of any physical attack. It was the same thing that made her perfectly cool in a crisis when danger threatened. She and Buck had been through a number of adventures such as railway and motor smashes, critical moments on hunting expeditions. She had saved his life on one occasion in Africa. Her nerve, at such times, was iron. She seemed to have a force in her that could not be defeated by pain, illness, accident or threat of hurt to her body. She laughed at such things; had endured, carelessly, enough physical suffering to make a chronic invalid out of most women. Nothing life did to her in that line could down her. She

had always dominated and defeated her body. It represented something untouchable; completely her own, to be disposed of only as she ordered. She had given it to Buck; had made it an instrument of passion as vibrant as a violin; but it was her own musical instrument, much more than in the case of most women, for she had poured her spirit into its fragile structure with such a concentrated intensity of feeling that her senses, nerves and muscles and flesh were electric with mind, with her mind. That had been her power, the source of her magnetism. Her spirit had magnetised her slight, boyish form and she had held Buck by the physical magnetism of her spirit, and so, very wisely, he had tried to break her spirit. He had failed. All his threats had failed. He had threatened that day to bring Sonia to Buckhaven Park at the end of the summer and install her there as the mistress of his house. He had said: "If you stay, in spite of this, you'll accept her or have your meals upstairs."

She told me this much when she came round after her long fainting spell. She wasn't quite aware of what she was saying. She groaned feebly, whimpered a little, rolled her head on the pillows, said in a childish voice: "I'd have my meals upstairs, he says. I feel so sick, Lina, so sick. Shall I try and be sick?" but when I got a basin, she dropped back on her pillows and

murmured again: "He couldn't do that, could he? He wouldn't put her in my place at his table and in this room, would he, with me in the house?" Then her head cleared, and her startled eyes stared at me, and she said, abruptly, in her usual voice: "He wants a divorce. He and Sonia want to get married. I've refused. I've told him I'll never divorce him, whatever he does, and I never will. I'd rather not say any more, if you don't mind."

And she said very little more during that fortnight. We avoided the subject and she avoided being alone with me. We spent most of our time with the boys. Maggie spent a lot of her's with David. They went off on long tramps together. She seemed to understand, at last, that he loved her in a special way and counted very much in her life. She said once, "When I'm old, David will look after me," and I watched her trying to make up to him for her past indifference. She had evidently set herself as well, to erase from his mind, if she could, the dreadful impression left by that awful scene. She was gay and full of jokes when she was with him.

"I've told him," she said, "not to worry. I've told him I thought it very brave of him to want to defend me, but that there was no need, really; that his father was very angry about something that he needn't bother about it and that it was all right now."

And David, of course, believed her. His laughter rang through the house. The school-room resounded with the noise of four obstreperous boys. It was only in the evenings, when we sat alone together in her sitting-room upstairs, that Maggie occasionally said something bearing on her problem. Once she said suddenly: "Nothing on God's earth would make me give Archie and Jeremy and John and David that woman as a step-mother. Suppose I got them legally; was given their custody. Buck would still have access to them. They'd come down here for their holidays and they'd find her. Buck is out of his mind, of course, but it's queer he should think he could make me do that."

And on another evening she said: "You remember we talked once about behaving well. What do you think the verdict on my behaviour will be now? They'll all say, our precious friends, that I'm behaving very badly. Well, let them. I don't care what they say."

She was right. She lost the sympathy of the community. Until it was known that Buck had asked her to divorce him, public opinion had been on her side. After that, it veered round. The men didn't say much, but the women said it was very unsporting of Maggie not to give Buck his freedom. They said: "What's the good of trying to keep a man who doesn't want to stay with you?"

She thinks he'll come back to her, I suppose. Women always do. Pathetic, I call it, and most humiliating for her and such a strain. She ought to know when she's beaten, take her licking and clear out. Fancy living on like that, with a man who hates the sight of you. They say he doesn't speak to her for days at a time, and it's not as if it were her show, or as if she contributed anything. All the money's his, isn't it? Well, I'm told he's made her a very generous offer if she'll go."

And so Maggie's poverty was used against her. She had her four hundred a year, that was all, and she had contributed nothing but four sons to Buck's establishment.

I wondered, a little, how they had got hold of so much data, those country neighbours of the Buckhaven's; then I realised. It was to Sonia's interest, of course, that certain facts should be known, and she contrived to let them be known without seeming to say anything. She was very discreet. She was never heard to criticise Maggie. She was sad and beautiful and silent. People began to say: "Poor Sonia. It's rotten for her. You can see she's eating her heart out, and he does so adore her. You never saw two people so obviously wrapped up in each other."

Sonia had become the injured one. She and Buck were romantic figures now; two tragic lovers, whose happiness was being ruined by a

mean, jealous wife. All the world loves a lover. Oh, my God!

It was incredible to me. At first, when anyone talked to me like that, I yelled with laughter. But after a while I became puzzled, and in the end I realised that Sonia had, as the saying goes, fallen in love with Buck. She had begun by wanting his money. She had calculated, cautiously and coldly. She had felt her way into his life slowly and carefully, with the mind of the level-headed business woman, concentrated on estimating his property, the eye of the adventuress measuring his public effect and the jaded but exceptionally developed sexual sense of the courtesan ready to be disappointed in this male's power to please. She had not been disappointed in anything. On the contrary, his fortune was much bigger than she had thought, his importance as a social figure greater. His house and his stables, his thousands of acres of farm land and his teeming collieries dazzled her. They did more; they satisfied her. They represented just what her Scotch nature craved—solid magnificence—and she saw, when she'd been in that hunting country a few weeks, that he was, indeed, a big man in the county and a big man in England. And again her blood influenced her. She belonged, really, to the humble British proletariat. She was one of those working women who stand in the Mall on a night when there's a

Court at Buckingham Palace and stare, one of those humble snobs who dearly love a Lord but "don't think much o' them foreigners," and these considerations affected her senses, affected her sexually, made her sentimental, emotional and romantic. It is usually the other way round. In most cases, sexual passion casts a glamour over the environment of "the loved one," another silly phrase! In Sonia's case, it was the environment that produced the passion. She realised that she didn't want to go back to Paris. Her house in Passy, her salon, her elaborate, careful life, all that was unnatural. She didn't like it. She liked this. Even her Continental religion was unnatural. She had joined the Church of Rome when she married de Castelray; de Castelray was a Catholic; all the best people in France were Catholics, but she'd been born and baptised a Scotch Presbyterian. She didn't really take the Abbé seriously, not now that she had got away. This was her country, or the next thing to it. Scotland? She'd not been in Scotland for how long? It would be fun to go back there as Lady Buckhaven, drive into the village in her Rolls, point out the house. . . . No, she couldn't do that. She'd forgotten that she'd not told Buck she came from Perthshire. He thought she was a Russian, born in exile in Paris. He must never find out. She must warn Marcella, make her learn her part. She didn't know what to do about

Marcella Mackintosh. Marcella wanted to come to England; she was getting restive. She'd gone off with a nigger band to Vienna, but she'd be coming back soon. Could she make Buck swallow Marcella Mackintosh? Probably. But she wasn't sure that she wanted to. She'd rather be rid of her and of everything that she stood for. She wanted to begin a new life at Buckhaven Park and sit at the head of Buck's long table with its massive family plate, its heavy solid silver candelabra, its weighty, shimmering glass. She wanted to be served by an old, respectful English butler and stolid footmen and stiff, sour-faced, efficient, English housemaids. She wanted to jangle a bunch of keys, look into lavender-scented linen cupboards piled with hundreds of strong, white sheets and pillow-cases. She wanted to count them and send for the housekeeper and say: "There'll be twenty people staying for the Hunt Ball. His Lordship wants the plate put out."

I am letting my imagination have its way with me over Sonia. I don't know, of course, what dreams she dreamed. I only know that she worked desperately to marry Buck; that she even, in the end, went to Maggie and cried and implored her, with melodramatic earnestness, to sacrifice herself for Buck's happiness. But I think I'm right in attributing these fancies to her.

Buck pleased her, of course, as a lover. He

was virile enough and passionate enough, and he brought to his passion for her just enough poetic ardour, but he was, above all, the unattainable man she'd dreamed of as a girl in a working man's house in a dour Scotch village. So she fell in love with him and set her heart on marrying him, and then she came up against the thin, haggard little creature she had brushed aside as of no consequence.

And I believe, oddly enough, that the weight shifted in the scales, very slightly, unknown to anyone, when Sonia fell in love with Buck, and I think, though no one believed it, that they were weighed down slightly on Maggie's side from that moment. For Maggie had grown hard while Sonia went soft. Maggie was fighting now, grimly, cynically and, for the time being, intelligently, for her rights and Sonia was fighting for her love. They had changed places. A soothsayer wasn't needed to foretell the result. Any one who had all the elements could have foretold it. I could have. Had I known, I would have staked my life on it. I might even have acted to prevent the end. Maggie was bound to win if she held on. She was at last in an impregnable position. Her heart was hard. It couldn't fail her any more. What could budge her, then, if she refused to budge? Nothing. Would Buck have come back to her? Of course he would. Every passion wears out. His for her had died,

hadn't it? None, not one, can outlast its time. The strongest is mortal, as men are. Life exhausts it. Life wears it out and kills it. What remains afterwards counts, determines the relationship.

It had taken ten years of life to exhaust Buck's passion for Maggie. How long, then, would it take to exhaust this one for Sonia? Five would be a generous estimate, probably half that would be more exact. It's a question of durable values. The enduring metal is a fusion of pure properties. Passion is a fire, but the bond that will bind a man to a woman permanently must be steel. Sonia was beautiful, but she was a mess. She was a mass of impurities; her mind was ugly; her heart was vile; her emotions were shoddy; even her body was inwardly unclean. She could offer Buck nothing perfect but her surface, and when that disintegrated under the effect of her sentimental longing, she was bound to sicken him.

Maggie didn't give life that last chance to even things out. She accepted the ugly facts that Buck had held up to her just when they began to crumble; gave him up finally at exactly the wrong moment; wiped him, that is, clean off the slate, decided not to take him into account any more, and acknowledged herself beaten just when she was beginning to win.

I say she gave him up at the wrong moment. I don't mean that she wavered about the divorce;

she stuck to her guns on that subject, and of course he did not install Sonia at Buckhaven Park. He installed her in London and joined her there. It had been a bluff, and Maggie had called it. She remained mistress of Buckhaven Park and was left there by herself. When I say she gave him up, I mean that she gave up any idea of winning him back, and made up her mind to live as if the man she had loved no longer existed, and when I say she took this decision at the wrong moment, I am assuming that there was still something of value to be saved from all this wreckage. That may seem more than doubtful. It is easy for a spectator, viewing the ruins of a house after a fire, to say there's nothing left in the blackened rooms worth saving. It may not seem so to the family whose home it was. They may be a sorry sight, probing about among cinders. It's no good saying they'll find nothing they want to save. Perhaps they know there's a fireproof safe full of solid silver or a locked iron box containing title deeds, marriage certificates, securities worth thousands of pounds buried under the mess. One would have said that Maggie's life with Buck was gutted; was a blackened, broken, empty edifice that could never be rebuilt. One would be inclined to say that he had destroyed all the securities that bore her name and given away to Sonia everything of value, but I'm not at all sure that it was so. I'm almost

sure, in fact, that it wasn't.

It is in the light of after events that I say this. I didn't think it at the time. I longed for Maggie to walk out of his house, fight for her legal rights over the boys and begin a new life. It was what I learned from her, at the very end, when she was dying, that convinced me she could never have got free from Buck, and it was the way he behaved when he arrived too late to speak to her, since she was already dead and couldn't hear his voice, that convinced me it was the same with him. His brutal anger that day in the nursery was a mild and pleasant thing beside the maniacal fury that possessed him when he reached the hospital to find her gone—to find nothing there but the thin, crumpled husk of her body and a nun saying her beads at the foot of the bed.

The good sisters said he was like a madman, one possessed of Satan. They told me he stood by the narrow, still, white bed and shouted rapid, loud words, chattering like a maddened monkey through jabbering jaws at the silent face that could not respond, could no longer quiver, could not open its hurt eyes that had held, at the very last, that little look of surprise at his not being there. The Sisters said it was very dreadful. They could not understand his words, but they knew he was cursing "La pauvre morte." They felt he was trying to tear from those closed lips, that stilled heart, an answer, an explanation

perhaps, a word of some sort, any word that would be a sign that she heard him.

"We were very frightened," said the nun in charge. "He was, we knew, her husband, and we could not refuse him admittance, but we stayed in the room and prayed that he might not fall upon her, for it seemed to us that he was impelled by a demon to attack the dead body and hurt it. Once we thought he was going to take it by the throat, and I prayed quickly to the Mother of God to prevent this sacrilege." But I think they misunderstood the menacing gesture; I don't think it was hatred. I think he wanted to take Maggie in his arms again, at last, and hold her, but couldn't because he had done her so much hurt and she was dead and Sonia was alive. I think Sonia followed him into that room, stood beside him by Maggie's dead body, wrestled with him while he stood there and frustrated Maggie's last unconscious claim on his devotion. And so the violence. What the good Sisters witnessed was a struggle of two women for a man's soul. But one lay still with closed eyes, and the other they could not see.

I know now that it was all a mistake, that Buck and Maggie were driven by a strong and ugly power to do things to each other and to themselves that they did not want to do. And so I say that they loved each other always, were more important, each to the other, than anyone, and I know

that Buck hated Sonia when he married her, and I suppose she knew it, too. I suppose that's why she came back to Marcella Mackintosh, because she couldn't stand Buck's hatred any longer.

But I was saying that Maggie would have been right in holding on just a little longer, and I know this is true. I know that, in spite of everything he had done, she would still have found it interesting to live with him, natural to grow old with him and not frightening to die with him beside her. Put it then, roughly, that she still loved him, and don't let's have any nonsense about its being contemptible of her, about her having no pride, no sense of shame. What had her vanity got to do with it? She never had any where Buck was concerned. "Keep me?" she had said in Regent's Park in 1899. "Of course he keeps me. Who else would I let pay the butcher?" She was shameless in regard to Buck, and not ashamed of her helpless love.

She denied it just at the wrong moment. She had believed in hers and in his so long; long enough. She had refused, long enough, to face the facts. She had listened for enough days to his voice, refusing to believe when it told her he hated her, had watched, unconvinced, his face that expressed the same thing enough hours and had spent enough nights crying out alone in the dark, but not acknowledging the knife that turned in her side. She had had enough of everything,

and she revolted. It all revolted her; her life with Buck and her love for Buck became disgusting to her. Looking back she shuddered. It made her sick. Because it was ended, because he had ended it in this particular way, by repeating it, by beginning a travesty of the very same thing with Sonia, it became nauseous.

She had been carrying in her side, all these years, remember, the heart of a very young woman. She had been virginal in her feeling for Buck and had remained so. Her intense concentration had cleansed her mind, kept her senses fresh and sexually she had remained chaste and shy. The nymph that had charmed me long ago had survived, frail and fragrant, under the battered shell of the abrupt, rude, nervous woman with the hoarse voice, voluptuous painted mouth and big defiant eyes. Now it died. She killed it, and she became a dead woman, an ordinary woman, and Life sprung on her, like a witch on to a broom-stick, animated her with its queer animal soul that takes no account of individuals, has no use for human beings, is a separate and menacing power inimical to each of us, and drove her into the arms of a dwarf.

Reggie Brown—what a name!—doesn't figure as a person in this drama. He was merely an instrument, one of life's most powerful agents, used to destroy Maggie. He was nothing to her but a monstrous occurrence, and counted in her

life simply as an inevitable, amazing accident.

When she turned up in Paris and told me she was in trouble and that I must see her through it, she couldn't force his name through her teeth. During those awful, heavenly June days, when we sat in my garden in the Rue de Varenne waiting for the thing the Sage-femme had done to her to take effect; she talked to me. It was then that she told me most of what I know, and I've written down what I've written from what she told me. But she couldn't bring herself, for a long time, to mention the man's name, and when she did she retched immediately afterwards as though the taste of his name made her feel sick.

She said it had happened in the back parlour of a pub after a long day's hunting. She said there was a row going on in the yard outside, horses' hoofs clattering on the cobblestones, stable boys shouting and a strong smell of horse over everything. He'd locked the door, she said, and it didn't take long. It was all over before you could say knife, and now, here she was, pregnant; that's how it was.

“But how did it come about in the beginning? How could you want to?”

“I don't know. I don't know. He was ugly, like a dwarf. Everything was ugly and hot. It was the heat, I think, his. I'd shiver and feel sick when he came near me, but he had a dreadful

sort of magnetism. He was powerful. He was strong as a bull. I'd felt dead cold and lifeless for a long time. It was his vitality, I suppose. He was a tremendous little brute. And after a while I thought, "What on earth does it matter what I do with my body," and I chucked it at him. I'd had a letter from Buck that day. I think I had some idea of having my revenge on Buck by letting the other one do what he liked. But I can't explain, I don't really know, and I didn't think of this happening."

That was about all Maggie said by way of explaining her own conduct. I have to fill in the rest for myself. It's not very difficult. Indeed most people would say what happened was exactly what one would expect. Most of the actual people who watched her shrugged their shoulders and smiled with a very curious, smug satisfaction. I think that worth noting. I think the attitude of that bit of the world very interesting. It was the usual attitude. Buck and Sonia, as a couple of tragic lovers, had gained not only the sympathy, but the respect of the community for their love affair. Some will say this proves that particular group to have been admirably human. I don't agree. I think it simply proves that they were so dull, so lethargic, so bound by habit and so dependent on their little comforts that anything in the nature of an emotion strong enough to break through a man's habits seemed

to them nothing short of a miracle. They knew just how selfish, luxurious and heavy with good things Buck was, because they were just like him, and so they respected the power that had wrenched him out of it, simply because it was unusual; simply because it surprised them. They were so amazed at his being willing to give up his hunting for a woman that they associated this thing with other incomprehensible mysteries such as religion, and they said to themselves, "He's a cut above the ordinary, that chap Buckhaven," and immediately, unconsciously, again quite automatically, Maggie fell in their estimation. If they admired Buck for leaving her, they couldn't admire her for being left. Had she shared their respect for Buck's passion and given him her blessing, yes. But she obviously did not agree with them. She was quite evidently being very nasty to Buck, the hero who had forsaken his pals, and his home, his lands and his live stock and his sons—all for love. So they assumed Maggie'd come to a bad end, and they would have been disappointed if she hadn't. It was proper that, deprived of their valuable friendship, she should take up with rotters, and when she began to be seen about with Reggie Brown, they smiled. They had prophesied correctly, and were satisfied.

And they remembered now that she wasn't one of themselves. She wasn't even English; she was American. And again they were pleased. It was

quite satisfactory that an American woman, without backing of any sort, without kith or kin, or money, or any stake in the country should behave badly, and the more badly she behaved the more grateful they were she was not one of them, and the more marked their antagonism.

I knew Maggie had been at Buckhaven Park alone most of the winter, and I knew she had taken to going about with a wild set, but I didn't know how isolated she was. She didn't tell me. She didn't ask me to come to her, perhaps because she didn't want me, perhaps because she thought that if Buck, on one of his short, rare visits, found me in the house, there'd be a bad explosion.

Buck only came down occasionally for the week-end. He had taken a house for Sonia in town, not in Regent's Park, in Green Street, and he spent most of his time there. He'd kept on his flat in St. James's all these years and lived there officially. He was careful of Sonia as he once had been careful of Maggie—almost as careful, not quite. It wasn't quite the same. Sonia might be Lady Buckhaven some day; it depended on Maggie; possibly on other things. It was just possible that he wouldn't, in the end, think it worth while ploughing through the mud of the Divorce Court a second time. He was still infatuated, certainly. But—I think there was a but—I think he was beginning to waver. He'd got a job at the Admiralty. I heard that he was

mysteriously occupied. We didn't know it, but the British Fleet was being got ready for war. Admiral Fisher had been overhauling it. He'd got a group of men round him who realised that in an emergency of the first magnitude, any sailor with brains was useful. Buck had friends in this group, and they'd called on him. His technical knowledge was by now archaic, but he had brains of the first order and exceptional administrative and organising ability, so they roped him in. And Sonia found herself face to face with Maggie's old rival, the battleship. But a new type of battleship. Such a monster of ravishing beauty as hadn't been dreamt of when that British squadron visited Manilla in 1898. The fourteen years had brought about a much greater change in the Navy than in Buck Dawson, Flag-Lieutenant on one of H.M. battle cruisers, who had turned the heads of half the women in the Philippines.

The shadow of the war hangs over all this. The sky was dark and lowering over England. Maggie, left alone down there in that hunting country, didn't notice. No more did I in Paris. We were absorbed in our own blind little lives.

I am hurrying on with this story. I am hurrying to get to the end of it. I haven't much time left. My time's up here in ten days. I've got to move on, and I want to finish this before I go to

wherever I'm going, though I don't know where that is.

But you see the irony. Buck was beginning to doubt his great passion just when his friends had come to think him a hero because of it, and Maggie had let go the rope that held her to him just when he was likely to grope for it. And Sonia's mind had turned soft just when it should have been hard as a stone.

CHAPTER VI

“Consequently, I rejoice since I am obliged to construct something upon which to rejoice.”

Queer words for me to quote, aren’t they, Tawaska? Rather late in the day to get hold of a new idea, just at the end, when there’s nothing more to be done. But there’s still time; just a little. I still have seven days more. Sixty seconds is enough for repentance, the Abbé used to say, and even Anna Schwartz, the Protestant Christian, believed that if you acknowledged yourself beaten, denied finally the small, invisible man inside you and flung yourself down at the foot of the Cross, that you’d be born again in the twinkling of an eye. Well, then, why isn’t seven days long enough to construct something from which to step off rejoicing into the abyss?

I have this house a week longer. A week is enough to put my affairs in order, and I know now where I am going when I leave. I am going to that other house, the closed one with the steep gables, that stands in a dense clump of trees. If I cannot get in, it’s no matter. I shall take no luggage, and it is dark and private under the

trees on the steps by the front door. No one goes there. It is a secluded place. I shall not be disturbed.

You wouldn't gather from this story that I felt I had much to rejoice about. Regret, anger and a bitter sense of frustration—that's been the note. But I will not carry remorse to the end like an iron collar round my neck, or fall on the ground with a heavy heart. It will not be like that; it will be a leap across a gulf and I must be light-hearted to manage that.

I have to tell of Maggie's death now, and I will not lament any more. Nor will I hold myself responsible for her death. For my own, yes. I'll take that responsibility, but I'm not responsible for her's. And I'm glad that I did what I did. Maggie appealed to me for help, and I helped her as best I could, that's all.

She arrived in the Rue de Varenne one afternoon towards the end of June. It was very hot. The fountains were playing in the garden, and I was lying on my chaise longue with a book, by the open window of my bedroom. The sound of church bells came tumbling over the roofs and gardens of the Faubourg, and I was listening, when suddenly I heard Maggie's voice.

“Lina!”

I jumped dreadfully at the sound of it. She was standing in the doorway in a limp frock. Her clothes seemed heavy and damp. Her face

glistened as if it were wet. She looked as if she'd been saved from drowning and was half dead with exhaustion.

"Maggie! What is it? What's the matter?"

But she couldn't speak. She just stood there, hanging on to the door for support and stared at me, with her throat working and her lips moving as if she were speaking.

It was a long time before I understood what had happened and what she wanted me to do, but when I knew, I did what she wanted as quickly as possible. It took me two days to find a Sage-femme who would perform the operation, but I did find her. I interviewed the woman, agreed to the exorbitant price she charged and then went back and fetched Maggie and took her up the steep, dirty stairs, and handed her over to the woman. And I waited in the stifling front room of the dreadful little flat while she did the thing to Maggie on the other side of the door that is a crime in the eyes of the law. Then, when Maggie came out, I took her home again and put her to bed and, not wanting the servants to suspect, tended her myself and went to the chemist's for what we needed, and then we waited, and when nothing happened, I went with her again to that nightmare street and waited again in the stifling flat. We paid three visits to the woman, waiting three days between each, and I found always the same soiled copy of *La*

Vie Parisienne, with a naked girl making eyes at me from its cover, and I turned the same pages over and over again, while I listened to the harsh, brisk street noises and wondered if Maggie was being hurt very much. And then at last, when the thing we'd been waiting for happened, and it went wrong and Maggie began to run a high temperature, I went back once more and fetched the woman late at night, and smuggled her into the house without the servants knowing and paid her another couple of thousand francs for telling me she could do no more; this was septic poisoning, and I'd better get my friend into a hospital as quick as I could.

It was the Abbé who helped me then. I hurried to him and said: "I have a friend desperately ill. I cannot take her to the American's hospital in Neuilly or send for my own doctor, because it must not be known that she is ill. She is in great trouble because of what you would call a mortal sin. Will you help me?" And he gave me a letter to the Sister of Charity in charge of a surgical clinique in a poor quarter of Paris, and she took Maggie in. We rushed her there at five in the morning in a taxi, one of the nuns and I. I remember the pale, lovely sunlight in the streets, the sense of a city waking, refreshed, and the stiff white coif of the good Sister swaying opposite me. She sat on the strapontin; I held Maggie in my lap. Her face burned against my shoulder and

she moaned a little, and spoke in a blurred, childish voice.

"Where are we going, Lina?"

"To a hospital, darling. There's a doctor there who'll put you right."

"Do you think he will?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Do you think it will be all right?"

"Yes."

"Because I don't care, you know, any more, only I'd like to send a message to Buck."

"I'll send it if it's necessary."

"Thank you," she said.

Maggie had to do what she did, and she had to die of it. It wasn't like my own case. I know that. I was sorry to see her so afraid. I'd never seen Maggie frightened before, but there it was. She was so frightened that she sat huddled up in a corner of my bedroom all the time I was out hunting for help. I left her there when I went out to look for her Saviour in the streets behind the Galerie Lafayette, and I found her in the same corner, exactly as I had left her, when I got back hours later; her head shoved down between her shoulders, her knees drawn up, her feet tucked under her skirt and her hands clasped together on her chest. I didn't know then what dreadful invisible violence of action it was that her motionless attitude portrayed, but I realised afterwards; she was cowering under blows that

were raining down on her. It was a peculiarly dreadful way for Maggie to look, because she had always been defiant of physical injury, and that is what made her misfortune particularly shameful for her.

I suppose hundreds of women of our world go through this sort of thing every year, in what are called civilised communities, and apparently they go through it unscathed. One had sometimes, listening to the conversations that went on at house parties in the bedrooms of big country houses, the impression that getting rid of a baby was not much more disagreeable than going to the dentist to have a tooth out. Well, it wasn't like that with Maggie. For her there was no excuse and no recovery, simply because she had always been, in the deepest sense, proud physically and passionately chaste. This thing meant ruin. It was the end of her, and she knew it. It wasn't only Buck she was afraid of. She may have felt that he would actually beat her to death with his fists if he found out, but it wasn't that terror that broke her. It was the feeling that she had betrayed the one thing she had staked her life on; that she had welcomed what was for her the unspeakably degrading experience, and that, as a result of doing so, she was lost.

And so I am glad for her sake that she died of it, for she wouldn't have resembled her old self again enough to make life worth anything to her.

Had she cared more for her boys ; had she had some strong sense of responsibility to her family ; had she even felt she belonged to that English life of hers and was under an obligation to go on with it, that might have been enough. She had none of these safeguards. She had lived dangerously for only one thing and one man, and now there was nothing to live for. The damage was irreparable. You see, she loved Buckhaven from the day she first met him until the day she died. She'd wanted no one but Buck ever. She loathed the other man, and it wasn't as if she were a wishy-washy creature. She had iron in her make-up. I said this about her at the beginning, and now I repeat it. There's a power in the world, evidently, that is too much for us. It destroyed Maggie. The Abbé would call it the Devil. I would call it Life. What difference does it make what one calls it? And what's the good of repentance? Repentance is a disease. It comes too late. It can undo nothing.

I know the Abbé hoped that Maggie's death would bring me into his fold. I think, when I went to him afterwards in great agony of mind, that he thought I was one of his lost sheep come bleating into the great, strong, aged shelter of the Church. He was very gentle with me, and I suppose I did scuttle to him, as a frightened sheep does to a shepherd, but for all his gentleness, I couldn't believe him when he said I would find

eternal peace for myself and for Maggie, who was dead, in the Church of Rome. The things he told me sounded like fairy-tales ; they were too good ; I knew they couldn't be true. And when he talked of the Holy Mother of God, I didn't know who he was talking about. I knew that God could not have had a mother. I could only think he was referring to the sweet, bovine Italian women Raphael and Bellini had painted in blue shawls, with babies in their arms, and I couldn't seriously consider those simple creatures as endowed with power to make my heart light and make Maggie happy again. They didn't appeal to me as even tolerable companions in my hard, heavy distress, and so, in the end, I doubted the Abbé, and when he continued to assure me that though Maggie's small, bodiless self was not dead, but wandering miserably in purgatory, and that I could bring her rest by having masses said for her soul, I laughed, and I began to doubt his sincerity. I even imagined that I heard a sinister note in his soft, persuasive voice, and I made excuses and backed away from the door he held open. Indeed, I hurried away several times from his garret, frightened by a curious impression of cunning in his bright, bird eyes, and I had a vision of him standing, smiling that subtle smile of his, with his small bald head to one side and beckoning, with one hand on the chain of a great open door, that would clang behind me forever if I entered.

“I am a shepherd,” he said, but I saw the shelter that he offered as a prison, and himself, in his brown, dusty robe, as a gaol-keeper, servant of an awful authority, and I fled from it.

The God of the Open Wilderness, perhaps; Him whom the American Indians called The Great Mystery. I might have worshipped that Being, or perhaps Jesus Christ as I saw him, once, in Spain, nailed to a cross and carried high on the shoulders of staggering drunkards — a lonely, terribly bruised man, exposed in his agony to the crowd, who were spitting out orange pips into the gutter. I might have recognised him as the only friend of man in the world. I don’t know. I can’t tell now, and I don’t know what difference it would have made, for I’ve been reading about Jesus Christ since I’ve been here, in Eliza Perkins’ Bible, and he has become a real character. But I do not find that this gives me faith in any possibility of undoing what is done and being saved or born again. He condemns me just as Tawaska condemns me. A life like mine is not a case for forgiveness; it’s simply a wasted opportunity. Forgiveness means nothing, does nothing. To be light of heart, I must construct something out of my lost life upon which to take my stand, and be glad.

But what I actually did, when I fled from the Abbé’s, was to turn to Marcella Mackintosh for distraction.

But I am getting confused in my dates. It was after the war that I took up with Marcella; I had forgotten. War was declared a few weeks after Maggie died. She was scarcely buried when the muttering began along the frontier; then it poured down across the earth like an avalanche, cutting an era in two and destroying a world.

For me it was a very simple experience. I shall not describe it. There are so many war books. I've not read them; I don't want to. I shall not forget the wounded men who passed through my hands in the hospitals of the Service de Santé, or the frightened men, who came along the dark, unlighted streets of the town, behind the lines, and knocked on my door and were admitted for the night. I don't know how many men came; I don't remember their names or their faces. Faceless men, with exhausted, nerve-wracked bodies that quivered in my arms, as David had done that night, long before, in London. And some of them cried dreadfully, just like children. Those were the ones that came, that I admitted. It was because of the demented look in their eyes. Eyes of boys, enormous with tragic apprehension, they reminded me of David. I nursed the wounded ones by day and the frightened ones at night, that was all. And I remember the dark, roaring background, and seem to remember myself as a large, tranquil, untired woman who found she could do simple things for those helpless men.

They were ghosts to me. Shuddering ghosts of men, come across the shaking ground, under fire, through an iron storm to the momentary shelter; the incredible peace and the dream companionship of my room. I think of them now as one man. It seems to me that only one man came, but I seem to have been many women to him, for, lying in my arms, he would call my name, half in sleep in the dark; and sometimes it was Mary and sometimes Jenny and sometimes Ruth, but it was never Caroline. So queer, that. "Mary, Mary!" the voice would call, as if from a great distance, whispering in my ear, or "Ruth, darling," or "Jenny," and I'd say, "Yes," and it would be some woman I'd never seen, away off somewhere in England, that would answer him, through my mouth.

And that is one of the things that happened to me in the world that I'm glad of. But it took a war to destroy the fear of sex and the fierce, sexual pride that had done so much to spoil my life. If I could have been young afterwards; if I could have known Hugo for the first time afterwards; if I could have married Jock when sex had become at last such a simple thing—I would have spared Hugo, and I would have been good to Jock. If we could only begin to live when we've learned how to live. It is when we are old that we should be young and start out.

Perhaps, grotesque as we appeared, that was

what we felt, Rosy, Jane, Violet and I, when we began to live again, with such frenzy, after the war. Perhaps there was some profound, protesting idea at work in us when we stood on our heads, doing exercises. Perhaps Marcella, the clown woman, the Jazz Queen, the grotesque step-daughter of the Mass-Man who had reared his head in Russia, represented something of the sort. She may have been shouting a true gospel, when she yelled to us, "Hello! Isn't it grand?" and told us to love one another and enjoy ourselves. Perhaps the ancient hags who danced the Charleston to her intoxicating rhythms were really young things. Perhaps it was good, what she did to us. How do I know? Who am I to say that she was not an inspired priestess and a prophetess? Because she looked like the fat woman in the side tent, because there was the sound of the hurdy gurdy grinding and the stench of beasts everywhere and a great many pickpockets and some murderers scattered about in the crowd at her circus, how do I know the show wasn't a good show? I don't know. I only know that for me it was bad, and that it involved me in my first and only disloyalty to Maggie, who was dead. For Sonia had come back. She had married Buck and lived with him, in Maggie's place, and then had left him, and she was living in Paris now with Marcella. How do I know what their relations were? I don't know. For all I know, Marcella

may have loved Sonia as I loved Maggie ; she may have loved her more. Perhaps it was she, Marcella Mackintosh, the clown woman, with the face like suet and eyes like currants and the body of a whale, who was capable of a true, sublime, unrequited passion. Perhaps she was the one great romantic lover whom I've met in my fifty-six years of life. I'm not sure that she wasn't. I only know that she was deliriously happy when Sonia came back to her. For the world was at Marcella's feet, now, and Sonia had come back with the world, and Marcella gave it to her. Every Paris dressmaker and American millionaire, every Russian grand duke and duchess, every Argentine dancer, Italian boxer, negro singer or Indian conjuror was offered to Sonia, and every party Marcella gave was got up for Sonia's amusement. And so, though I tried to avoid Sonia, I couldn't avoid her as long as I remained a part of the circus. I'd find myself drinking with her from the same bottle of champagne, putting money on the same horses or playing baccarat at the same table. Her name was Lady Buckhaven now, and I heard it everywhere, and each time I heard it I'd think twice, once of Maggie, and yet I put up with Sonia. I was civil to her. When people said, "Do you know Lady Buckhaven?" I'd say, "Oh, yes. I've known her a long time," and I smirked when she spoke to me and said to myself, angrily, "What does it matter?"

This curious state of things lasted until Tawaska came to see me in 1925.

I'd not seen him since Jock's trial in 1911. Now he turned up from Russia, bringing the climate of Siberia into my warm interior. I'd been playing bridge—the usual four, Rosie, Jane, Violet and myself. They'd just taken themselves off to be massaged and coiffed, manicured and macquilléd before dining with Marcella at the Ritz. It was to be one of her large dinners. All the gang would be there and the new favourite murderer and the latest American millionaire, who'd invented a patent bed and whom Sonia had annexed, with his yacht and his racing stable and his villa at Deauville—and I, too, expected to be there. Phillips was to call for me at nine.

Tawaska sat down and waved his paws and spoiled it all. The room went dark; all the brilliant, noisy world went dark and silent, and I felt dreadfully cold.

He had joined up in Russia during the war, and had gone with the Army into Siberia as a regimental surgeon.

“That's funny,” I said. “We were doing the same thing and, in this instance, at the same time, but on different fronts. There was the whole of Prussia and Poland in between.”

But he wasn't interested in that or, apparently, in anything. He seemed to go to sleep when I

told him about Maggie's death.

"Your friend, Lady Buckhaven, was not an interesting woman," he said, when I'd finished.

Nothing seemed to be interesting, until he mentioned having seen David Dawson, but he kept that bit of news till the end. He asked me a few questions first.

"Your husband, did he come out of prison?"

"Yes. He came out in the second year of the war. But he wasn't well. They wouldn't pass him fit for the Army, so he went to America, to a ranch we've got in California."

"He is there now?"

"No; he's dead."

"And what did you feel when he died?"

"Nothing much; a mixture of regret and relief."

"Yes—and now. What are you doing?"

"I am amusing myself."

"Indeed," he said softly. "You've found new amusements?"

"No. I do the same old things. I gamble, I drink, I dance, I make love."

At that his little eyes closed. His large, smooth face went completely blank. I cannot explain how awful it was; how much more awful than any expression of disgust.

"Well, why not?" I shouted, suddenly very angry. "What else is there to do? What did you expect, Tawaska? You refused to be a

friend. You've avoided me all your life. You've been watching me for years make a mess of it all, and have never done a thing to help me. You've just prowled round the edge of my life like a great, clumsy Polar bear and waved your silly paws at me from your cold, blighting distance. For all the good you've done me, you might as well have been one, really—a shaggy brute living in Greenland. Why do you come to see me? Why do you bother me? You should have left me alone, if you were going to assume no responsibility for what became of me. Well, you can see that much, anyway! For God's sake look at me. Take a good look, and go away."

And he made a very slight sound like "tut tut" at the end of this outburst, and then told me about David Dawson, and I went off into a wild, horrible fit of laughing. I had formed that habit, you remember, of yelling with laughter instead of crying. It's the same thing, really; only a bit more savage than tears, and it brings no relief.

David had turned into a very beautiful and slightly depraved young man, Tawaska said. He had a soft exterior and his face was blurred with drink, but there was something tense and stiff inside him, and he thought it could be called hatred. It had been clear to Tawaska that David had become a hater, not a silly, self-satisfied cynic like many youths, but a cold, intolerant young man, older than his years, whose motive power

was hatred. "He is cruel," Tawaska said. "He is cruel to himself first, and secondly, to everyone else. He hates Lord Buckhaven and his brothers and the effeminate young men who are his companions. He has nothing to do with women; he hates them too much. He has a slight interest in evil; if he believes in anything, it is in the essential principle of evil. He is just half a man—the unhappy half. But he laughs at everything. His laugh is high, thin and hysterical and his eyes are black with hatred and unconscious suffering while he laughs. One of my friends, who is a don, thinks he is a very fascinating young man. "He'll come to a bad end," he said, but he is rather a stupid person, that friend of mine, and he cannot know. I think, when he is older, that David Dawson will be very ordinary—not in the least interesting."

It was when I had done yelling with laughter that I asked Tawaska to take me out of it all. I think I went down on my knees to him; I think I grabbed his big hand and hung on to it and was dragged across the floor. But no. That's impossible. I've never touched him. It only seemed like that, because after he'd gone, I found myself kneeling on the floor and shaking. But he didn't throw me down. He only said, in that cold, soft voice of his that made his words seem like snowflakes falling, "If you are alone go away and be alone," and I've not seen him since, and I think

I was simply shivering with cold when he'd gone.

Well, I didn't go to Marcella's dinner that night. I got my maid to put me to bed, light a cheerful fire, give me a hot toddy, and I went away a few days later. But I didn't come straight here. That was five years ago. I went to South America and then to Constantinople, and the following year to Australia. And I kept going back to Paris in between trips, and I went back to the Abbé, whom I'd fled from, and he gave me work to do among his poor. But I kept thinking of David when I was with those children; and then the Abbé died. He died a few months after Sonia married the American millionaire, who'd made a fortune in patent beds. Buck divorced her in 1927, I think it was, and they said, in Paris, that her marriage broke the little Abbé's heart. It's odd, that. I can't quite believe it. Could he have really felt that her marrying and being divorced and then marrying again outside the Church was a greater obstacle to her salvation than some of the other things she'd done? No. I think he was simply too tired to carry our heavy troubles any more. I remember how feeble and how shrunken he looked the last time I saw him in the Rue de St. Pères, in his little flat under the roof, feeding the sparrows opposite the rainspouts of St. Sulpice.

His death made a great difference to me, and Marcella had dropped me. I didn't belong to the

gang any more, but I went on for a bit longer, doing the same things. There were always cards and horses, shops and theatres and concerts to fall back on, and I had a dog I was fond of, and an excellent masseuse. And these things were enough, apparently, to pass the time. And then suddenly, for no reason that I can recall, I closed the Paris house and came away. That was six months ago.

It had taken me five years to act on Tawaska's advice, and I don't know why I did finally act on it. Perhaps I had been waiting for something, but I don't know what it could have been. I went to England once to see David at school, but was not allowed to see him. I wrote to him several times, but he didn't answer. I couldn't have been waiting for an answer all that time. In any case, I never got one. He never wrote to me, and I've not seen him since he ran away from school and came to Paris to find Maggie, who was dying. He was only a little more than ten years old then; still quite a small boy. The picture I have of him was taken about that time. It is an impressive and dramatic face, with its frowning, intolerant brows, its clear eyes, its soft mouth. There's the fresh bloom of babyhood on it still, but there's the character of a man forming, and it stamps the fine, small face with dignity and the pose of the head is very proud.

I don't know how David got to Paris, or what

it was that alarmed him enough to make him do it. It's not easy to run away from school and get to London and cross the Channel without being stopped when you are only ten years old. It took courage and intelligence, and the impulse that impelled him to make the attempt must have been very strong. It must have been particularly strong in David, because he took school life seriously and had a great respect for authority. It was in no sense an escapade and in no way a coincidence that he arrived when he did. I am convinced that he knew he was racing against fate to get to his mother in time, and I think he thought of her as in peril. I think, too, that he had a serious, if a childishly confident, purpose in coming. He still believed, you see, that the world was wonderful and life glorious, and I think he came, not for his own sake, but for hers. It would be in character for David to commit a grave misdemeanour and incur the full penalty of the law in order to defend Maggie, but he would not have done so for his own satisfaction. Child though he was, he had learned to go without the thing and the person he most wanted. Let me put it exactly as I see it, even though it may sound exaggerated. I think David's coming was her small boy's desperate and gallant effort to come to Maggie's rescue.

It was before the war, of course, when there were no passports, and he must have had money.

I know he'd got ten pounds in the bank because his father had given him a pound every birthday, and I think he had a little more in Post Office certificates. I suppose he must have gone to the bank when he got to London. I know he climbed out of one of the back windows of the school building in the night and walked five miles to a distant station, where he'd be less likely to be recognised, and caught a milk train to London. That was intelligent, and it was intelligent of him to get the porter in the London station to telephone for him to Buckhaven Park before he took his ticket for Paris. I can see him standing inside the telephone-box telling the man what to say. "Ask if Lady Buckhaven's at home, please."

"She's not."

"Then ask where she is, please."

"She's in Paris."

"Thank you. That's all I wanted to know."

I'm sure he was very polite to the porter, and I think he must have impressed all the people he had to do with that day as being quite able to look after himself. For no one stopped him. No ticket collector or guard on the train, nor any friendly fellow traveller, though I was told afterwards that an acquaintance of the Buckhaven's sat in the same carriage with him from Calais to Paris. The man said: "I thought it was one of Buckhaven's boys, but I couldn't be sure, and the little chap didn't give me a chance to speak

to him. I dunno why, but he made me feel that I couldn't, you know. He just sat there, staring out of the window and never moved. There was a funny look about him. He looked as if he were pretty scared, but wasn't going to let on. He frowned, and kept a stiff upper lip and never looked our way."

He came straight to my house. He'd guessed Maggie would be staying with me. But she had already gone to the hospital, and I was there with her. It was the afternoon that she died. I've checked the times, and I think she died just before David's train got into the Gare du Nord. The servants didn't know what to do when they found him at the front door. They didn't know who he was till he explained, in his bad, school French, and then they didn't dare tell the little boy that his mother had been taken to the hospital. So they said she'd gone out.

I don't know and never shall know just what exquisite fear and excruciating knowledge made him run away from school and rush to his mother. Nor do I know what small incident sounded in him the insistent alarm. Perhaps he had written to Maggie and had no answer. Possibly she had written him a letter that made him suspect that something awful was happening to her. Perhaps she just said that she was ill. He didn't tell me, so I don't know how much he guessed or what he was thinking while he sat in my salon waiting for

her to come home. I think he surely must have thought she would come. I don't think he could have believed he'd never see her again, and yet I can't explain his quiet, his awful control of himself while he waited, unless he had divined the truth. Perhaps he knew without knowing. Perhaps he was two people, a very small boy waiting for his mother, who was bound to come back to him in a few minutes, and a very old soul that knew in some way that shall remain inexplicable till humanity has lived several thousand years longer—that he would never see her again.

I had to tell him she was dead; I was telling him when Buck arrived. I had telegraphed Buck, and he had come by air, having missed the train David had caught. David had got there first because he had started first, had got his mysterious message of summons before Buck got my telegram. But they both arrived too late, and I wish now, oh, God, how I wish I had not telegraphed to Buck, for he tore David away from me, rushed with him out of the house, and David's wild, sobbing screams filled the courtyard, rang, piercing and dreadful, down the street. "Don't, Daddy. Oh! don't, Daddy. Don't."

Those were the only words I heard. Foolish words, most childish. They were almost the same that I heard him use once before in the school-room at Buckhaven Park when he was separated

from Maggie, but this time that high, shrill little boy's voice rang out above the noises of the street with an agony more piercing than any sound I have ever heard come from grown man or woman.

And yet Maggie hadn't mentioned David when she realised that she was dying. He had had a premonition about her, but she had had none about him. She'd no idea he was hurrying to her. I don't think she thought of him. I don't think he was important enough to reach her in her burning delirium. No one was important enough for that, except Buck. He did it; he was there while she raved, and she raved to him, kept repeating his name and saying, "Buck, dear. Oh! Buck, help me," and then, at last, when she came out of the delirium and looked for him, I caught that dreadful little look of surprise in her eyes. "Buck isn't here," she whispered. "Why?" and then she died.

And I don't know what Buck told David about his mother or what he and Sonia may have done to him between them during the years Sonia spent at Buckhaven Park in Maggie's place, for I never saw David again.

CHAPTER VII

To-morrow is my last day here. I have only one or two little things to do. I have to take Mike and his friends on a picnic, and I have to pay Joanna's wages and lock my trunks. And I must do something with this manuscript. I'll make a package of it and just leave it with my other papers. I couldn't send it to the Abbé or to Tawaska, for neither has left an address. In any case, Tawaska wouldn't be interested. Who would be? Whom does it concern, this story? Anyone or no one? I've a niece; rather a good girl, to whom I've left some of my things. Perhaps she'll find it. There might be something in it that would interest her. It's no matter. I don't mind what becomes of it, or whether anyone reads it. I wrote it for myself, but it's not particularly private. I've no feeling of that sort; I feel too far away to care who reads my letters. Posthumous vanity or shame won't trouble me.

There's only one thing that troubles me; the feeling that I may miss Tawaska again by a hair. I thought I saw him go down the village street yesterday, but when I got to the gate there was no one in sight. The street was empty, strangely empty, and the sunlight was pouring down the

trunks of the elm trees and all the leaves were whispering, and the village seemed very far away, as things do sometimes in dreams. And now this little house and this room that I'm sitting in is very far away, too; as far off and inaccessible as the world of the old Aztec, who stares past me from distance to distance. I do not care for him any more. He does not affect me any more, that old ancestor. Nothing of that sort is of any consequence; nothing matters now but to be glad that it is all finished.

I went to see that house yesterday, the dark one that's empty. The wind was blowing. I opened the gate and went up the dark tunnel under the trees to the narrow door, and the wind was roaring in the trees. And I sat down on the steps that led up to the front door and listened for a long time, and the closed house was full of voices. Maggie's and Hugo's and the Abbé's, I heard them sounding inside, far away in the dim rooms, and I heard David's voice rising above them all, but most faint and distant. He seemed to be singing, as he sang in the school choir that Sunday, long ago, when I went down to see him; singing with all his heart. Very far away behind me in the mysterious house I heard that piercingly sweet, high, boy's soprano. It shot up like a rocket above the choir of fresh young voices. It was startling to hear it ring out like that; like a silver bugle; like the silver cry of fifes

heard once, above the rumble of a London street, summoning men to war.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth." That was the anthem the boys sang. Old words that I do not understand, sung by a very young voice, high, certain, frail and triumphant. That was before his voice broke; I say before his voice broke. I am only speaking of his voice, and I am glad that I can hear it, and heard it only yesterday in that empty house that belongs to me.

I have read through what I have written and I find it very confused. But that is the way I remember my life, and I think that I have been as truthful as I can be. Certainly I have drawn no true portrait of anyone; I do not know how. The difficulty is one of transfer; I cannot pass to you a true impression as I could pass a gold coin; the exchange is impossible. You would not recognise Maggie from what I've told you, if you met her in the street; you wouldn't know David. Perhaps when you've read this story you may seem to be acquainted with them. But if you brought up to me your new friend, Lady Buckhaven, and her son David, and presented them, I'd say: "I'm sorry; I think there is some mistake. The Lady Buckhaven I knew was someone else. She was, I'm afraid, someone no one ever knew but me; a unique woman with a solitary friend who cannot make her known to you." But all of this is very confusing, and it is no longer

necessary or interesting to dwell upon the confused aspects of her life and mine. It is necessary now, at the end, to testify emphatically to the fact that Maggie was a positive, concentrated character, and to anyone who loved her, unforgettable; and I know that Buck Dawson, growing heavy and old off there, alone in England, remembers her often, and that David, who has turned out so strangely, cannot have forgotten her.

As for the others, it is true that I cannot remember them distinctly, or bring them back again. It is a fact that I cannot recall Hugo's face or experience again the emotions he once aroused, but I have, when I think of him, that sense of sweetness I spoke of, and I'm glad of that. Jock's image dances before my eyes; a bewildering figure. He is a lightning change artist, who whirls like a dervish, changing his identity while I watch; faun, centaur, horse coper, derelict tramp, frightened child, continental dandy, convict; I don't know what sort of man he was. I never knew him and I shall never know him, but I understand him a little better than I did, and I suppose I may be permitted to be glad that I know I was wrong about him.

Life: I've been writing about Life the enemy and about my life. I know that Life has defeated me, and I know that a proposition was put to

me, when I was born, that had nothing to do with happiness, and that I failed to grasp its meaning. But what does it matter, Tawaska, that my life has been nothing but a bad dream? The world is beautiful, and I saw it in my sleep, and I can be glad of that.

And finally, this trifling affair that I thought so important while I lived it; I rejoice to be done with it. Nothing more can happen now, and I'm glad.

* * * * *

It has happened; the one thing; the only thing that was needed. Tawaska came to-day while I was out with Mike and his friends having a Clambake on the rocks. He talked to Joanna. He told her to tell me that he was sorry he had missed me. She told me when I came in, and I turned and ran from the house when she told me, and I ran down the street, and I asked everyone I met if they had seen him, a very big man, very white, with a smooth, cold face, but they only looked frightened and hurried away from me. I went to the railway station and the harbour and the hotel. But I didn't find him. No one had seen him. I could discover no trace of him and so, at last, I came back.

And after sitting here awhile, I began to doubt, so I called Joanna and questioned her. Yes, it was the Doctor Tawaska, she said.

"Are you certain? How do you know for certain?"

"I know him quite well. He has been here before."

"What?"

She eyed me frostily over her big, folded arms.

"He is an old friend of Miss Elizabeth's," she said.

And at that I burst out laughing. I screamed and screamed with laughter, and Miss Eliza's cook stood and stared at me, shocked but indifferent, for I am, after all, nothing to her; and to-morrow I'll be gone.

Well, Miss Elizabeth, who is an old friend of Tawaska's, will have to see to the things I've left here. I've asked Joanna to store them in the wood-shed till I send for them. But I shan't send for them.

And now I must rejoice, since I am obliged to construct something upon which to rejoice, that I once more, and for the last time, have missed Tawaska. Nor do I say it with irony. Irony is too easy. Life taken as a farce is all too comprehensible. There's something better than that in this; there's a complete, solid coherence. It was suitable and logical that I should miss him. I have always just missed him, and I take this episode as a proof that what he said of our relationship was true. We had no other; we weren't friends; I didn't love him; I wasn't his disciple.

I never knew where he was or what he was doing. I couldn't understand his purpose and he wanted nothing from me. But he was in California nearly fifty years ago, and I just missed him there and he came here to-day. I don't know how he knew where to find me. I don't even know that he came to see me. He may have come to see Elizabeth Perkins and have found out, when he got here, that I was occupying his house. All I know is that he came here, and the accident of his coming completes the circle. There is no beginning to a circle, and no end.

And so, Tawaska, I am leaving, but I shan't say good-bye to you. And I am glad that you refused to let me join you in the world, for every passionate intimacy is a sort of death, and had you allowed me to love you, we would have destroyed each other. There's a dark house waiting for me and for you; a wilderness. I see the black sunlight glittering on the dark prairie grass and your solitary figure striding across it, growing smaller in the distance.

THE END